

Duquesne University Duquesne Scholarship Collection

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Fall 2008

Lived Experiences of Widows in Botswana: An Ethnographic Examination of Cultural Rituals of Death, Loss, Grief, and Bereavement: Implications for Counseling

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga-Ramatebele

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Msimanga-Ramatebele, S. (2008). Lived Experiences of Widows in Botswana: An Ethnographic Examination of Cultural Rituals of Death, Loss, Grief, and Bereavement: Implications for Counseling (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/958>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact phillips@duq.edu.

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN BOTSWANA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
EXAMINATION OF CULTURAL RITUALS OF DEATH, LOSS, GRIEF,
AND BEREAVEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING.

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Education,
Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program,
Department of Counseling, Psychology, and Special Education

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga-Ramatebele

December 2008

Copyright by

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga-Ramatebele

December 2008

DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education

Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Executive Counselor Education and Supervision Program

Presented by:

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga-Ramatebele
Institute of Health Sciences, Botswana, R/N., 1977
Institute of Health Sciences, Botswana, C. M., 1979
University of Botswana, B.Ed., 1986
University of Botswana, PGDCE, 1986
Queensland University of Technology, M.S.N., 2000

June 12, 2008

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN BOTSWANA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC
EXAMINATION OF CULTURAL RITUALS OF DEATH, LOSS, GRIEF, AND
BEREAVEMENT; IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING

Approved by:

_____, Chair
Lisa Lopez Levers, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

_____, Member
William J. Casile, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

_____, Member
Emma Mosley, Ph.D.
Associate Professor

ABSTRACT

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN BOTSWANA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF CULTURAL RITUALS OF DEATH, LOSS, GRIEF, AND BEREAVEMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELING.

By

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga-Ramatebele

December 2008

Dissertation supervised by Lisa Lopez Levers, Ph.D.

The purpose of this investigation was to examine experiences of widows in Botswana regarding the performance of cultural rituals, as they mourned their husband's deaths. The study sought to find out aspects of the rituals that enhanced or hindered healing; and how insights and knowledge gained from the results of the investigation can inform culturally relevant and sensitive psychosocial interventions. The study involved two focus group discussions and seven key informants from two villages in the Northern and Central districts of Botswana. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data through focus group discussions which were video-recorded; data from the key informants was captured through note-taking.

The results of the study revealed that if cultural rituals were undertaken timely by a designated elder, they provided grieving widows with multiple sources of support, and thus, enhanced healing. However, when the tradition protocol was disorganized, widows

reported feeling insurmountable pain and emotional hurt and perceiving elder attitude as that of neglect. Cultural rituals carry specific and special meanings to widows and their community; as such, they are observed to satisfy personal needs, comply with societal expectations, as well as prevent mysterious and lethal ailments that are believed to be harbored by a new widow.

Despite the comfort and solace that widows said they enjoyed from the support provided by elders and performance of traditional rituals, widows reported experiencing other issues that did not fall under the realm of the cultural practices, which were subsequently not addressed. Widows expressed feelings of loneliness, intrusive thoughts, overwhelming pain, and extreme anxiety regarding their future without their husbands. In some instances, these experiences were compounded by struggle with their in-laws over the deceased's estate, pointing to the need for legal and psychosocial supports.

Traditional and professional interventions represent two compatible approaches of care to grieving widows, but they are provided to the same population in a non-collaborative way by service providers. If these approaches could be combined, they would ensure a comprehensive, culturally appropriate, and sensitive service. The findings of this investigation call for recognition of traditional culture during counseling interventions and their incorporation into counselor education and supervision programs.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the following people: Mr. and Mrs. Khwini Magalane—my grandparents for their upbringing with love, care, protection, and guidance during my early childhood years. Mr. and Mrs. Msimanga—my parents who provided parental and financial support which enabled me to acquire a basic education--the foundation to my academic life; Mr. Life Botshelo Ramatebele—my (late) husband and father of my children; all my children—Zwelibanzi, Charity & Isaac (son-in-law), Lebogang, and Princess; and my grand children--Thembinkosi, Mpaphi, Gobe, and Queen—and those yet to be born.

“I am because you are, and because you are...I am.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reach the summit of this academic mountain, I am indebted to individuals who supported and motivated me throughout this enormous expedition. First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the Botswana Government for the privilege of being offered a scholarship to fulfill my personal as well as academic goals. I also am indebted to my government for their financial support of my other studies, which were a foundation for this degree.

Second, I want to express my appreciation for the undivided support and encouragement of Dr. Levers, my dissertation committee chair; her studious feedback, her outstanding reviews and insights into the layout and the presentation of this document have greatly contributed to the successful completion of this piece of work. Additionally, Dr. Levers has been my advocate in many other aspects of my life, beginning with my admission to the DU School of Education up to the completion of my studies, owing to her knowledge regarding my country, hence my culture. I want to make special mention of Dr. Casile for not only being my dissertation committee member, but for being my anchor in my most trying times during my studies, and in my social life as well. Above all, Dr. Casile has been a model counselor and educator for me, which I value and will strive for in my working life. Dr. Mosley is appreciated for taking time off her busy schedule to sit on my dissertation committee; her contribution and feedback has been an invaluable asset to me.

My warmest thanks are extended to all the professors in the DU School of Education that I have come across in the program, for molding me to be the kind of

professional that I am today. Thank you! I am particularly indebted to Lori Jockel, for the support she provided me with, specifically her sensitiveness and readiness to act, each time I needed help—keep it up Lori! Third, my deep appreciation goes to my late father, Alfred Nkalo Msimanga, and my late husband, Life Botshelo Ramatebele, for instilling the value of education in me. In their differing ways, they also enlightened me about the rewards of hard work...Rest in Peace. Gratitude is extended to my mother, Ruth Mzondwase Msimanga, for always being the voice of reason when all else seemed meaningless. A special word of thanks is extended to my daughter, Charity for “holding the port” back home and on my behalf, without whom I would have been critically distracted from my studies—thank you very much. I also want to acknowledge Comfort and Isaac Khani’s support during my travels in many other countless ways.

Fourth, I am deeply appreciative for my family here in Pittsburgh; Lebogang, Princess, and Thembinkosi for their general support in many different ways, and specifically assistance with technology, which generally poses a huge challenge for me. Accordingly, their support and patience also allowed me to bury myself into my work, even during times they needed me the most. My warmest gratitude is to my friends and my country people and special mention is to my co-researchers, who in their small or big ways supported me and have added to my successful completion of the Doctor of Philosophy Degree.

Last, but not least, special mention is extended to Pastor Isaac Jere, and the holy congregation of the Pittsburgh Gospel Tabernacle, who were my pillar of support, socially, spiritually, and financially, especially in times of loss of my relatives that I incurred during my stay in the United States of America...May God bless you all!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Background of the Problem	4
Geo-Cultural Background.....	4
British Influence.....	5
Introduction of Christianity.....	10
Christianity and Education.....	11
Medium of Instruction in Schools.....	13
Misconceptions about Education	15
Statement of the Problem.....	18
Importance of the Study.....	22
Purpose of the Study	25
Research Question	25
Rationale	26
Significance of the Study	27
Definition of Terms.....	30
Delimitations of the study	32
Organization of the Dissertation	33
Chapter II: Literature Review	35
Theoretical Underpinnings	35
Attachment Theory	35
Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Model.....	39

Universal Responses to Death	41
Tasks of Mourning.....	41
Cultural Responses to Death.....	44
Responses in Botswana and Southern Africa	45
Family Meaning-Making in Death	46
Family as a System	46
Constructivist Approach to Meaning-Making	48
Functions of Cultural Rituals in Death	49
Healing.....	51
Creation of a Community of Support.....	52
Communication.....	54
Full Acceptance of the Loss.....	56
Sanctioning the Bereaved as the Chief Mourner	57
Rituals Assist the Bereaved to Express Themselves.....	58
Rituals Help Grievers Make Meaning from the Loss	60
Rituals Create Structure and Order	62
Ancestor Veneration	65
Cleansing.....	67
Stages of Mourning.....	69
The Tripartite Stage Process of Death Rituals.....	69
Separation	70
Transition (liminality)	71
Re-aggregation	72

The Chronologic Stages of Death Rituals.....	73
A Representation of the Society of Botswana	73
At the News of Death.....	74
Chaos and Confusion	76
Male Response	77
The Widow as a Patient	78
Community Mobilization.....	79
Words of Comfort and Strength.....	80
Setting the Tone for the Burial.....	80
Deceased’s Body Comes Home—the Day before Burial	81
The Night Vigil—the Last Farewell	82
The Morning of Burial	83
Journey to the Gravesite.....	83
At the Graveyard.....	84
The Burial-Grand Finale	84
Back at Home –After the Burial	86
Weaning off, Support from the Bereaved Family.....	87
Shaving Heads- Initial Cleansing.....	88
Observance of Communal Taboos.....	89
The Cleansing Ceremony.....	89
Summary of Chapter II	90
Chapter III: Methods.....	93
Conceptual Framework.....	94

Choosing a Qualitative Method	94
Symbolic Interactionism	96
Methodology and Instrumentation	97
Methods	98
Focus Group Interviews	98
Key Informant Interviews	99
Researcher Observation	100
The Researcher as an Instrument	100
Sampling Procedures	103
Study Setting and Participant Selection	104
Selection of Participants	107
Ethical Issues and Participant's Rights	108
Research Design.....	110
Data Collection	112
Duration of Interviews	115
Capturing and Preserving Data	115
Data Analysis.....	117
Identifying Meaning Units	117
Limitations of the Study.....	120
Summary of Chapter III.....	121
Chapter IV: Results.....	123
Preliminary Visit and Participant Solicitation	126
Low Attendance	128

Group Relationships.....	128
Setting the Mood for the Discussion.....	129
Emergent Themes	130
Theme I: The Community Gathered Together and Secured a Place for Lying-in..	131
Theme II: Lying-in was an Appropriate Act, Exemplifying Care, and Respect.....	132
Theme III: The Night Vigil Evoked Intense Pain, Intrusive Thoughts, but, with Soothing Reflections	134
Theme IV: Garbing—Maintaining Spiritual Connection with the Deceased	136
Theme V: The Burial—A Time for Realizing the Truth (About Death)	138
Theme VI: Cleansing and “Undressing”	140
Theme VII: Counseling—an Unknown Phenomenon	145
Theme VIII: Widows’ Recommendations to Policy Makers.....	146
Recommendations Regarding Counseling.....	146
Recommendations Regarding Cultural Tradition	147
Focus Group Two	149
Preliminary Visit to Village B and Participant Solicitation.....	150
Group Relationships.....	151
Setting the Mood for the Discussion.....	153
Emergent Themes	153
Theme I: Community Gathering Together and Securing a Place for Lying-in	154
Theme II: Lying-in: An Appropriate Act, Exemplifying Care and Respect.....	156
A Time to Think.....	156
Respect and Care.....	157

Theme III: The Night Vigil Evoked Intense Pain, Intrusive Thoughts, but, with Soothing Reflections	159
Theme IV: Garbing—Maintaining Spiritual Connection with the Deceased	163
Theme V: The burial—A Time to Realize the Truth (about death).....	165
Theme VI: Cleansing and “Undressing”—Getting Rid of Senyama.....	166
Theme VII: Counseling—an Unknown Phenomenon	171
Theme VIII: Widows’ Recommendations to Policy Makers.....	172
Key Informant Interviews	175
Key Informant Interview 1—Mama-T.....	176
Key Informant Telephone Interviews	184
Key Informant Interview 2—Same’	185
Key Informant Interview 3—Joyce	189
Key Informant Interview 4—Botlhale	192
Key Informant Interview 5—Lulu	195
Key Informant Interview 6—Sarah	197
Key Informant Interview 7—Bongani	199
Summary of Chapter IV	206
Chapter V: Summary, Discussion, Recommendations, and implications	210
Summary of Findings.....	210
Hypotheses Generated from the Investigation.....	233
Recommendations and Implications	234
Awareness and Sensitization Seminars on Counseling	235
Widow-to-Widow Support Program.....	236

Policy Formulation	237
Culture-Oriented Counselor Education and Supervision Programs	238
Culture-Oriented Education Curricula	241
Integration of Services—Traditional and Professional	242
Research Studies and Documentation.....	243
Traditional Culture and Documentation	243
Counseling	245
Conclusion	245
References.....	248
Appendix A: Letter to the Permanent Secretary: Ministry of Unified Local Governments and Lands	258
Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Focus Group Interview	261
Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide for Individual Interviews.....	263
Appendix D: Description of the Study.....	265
Appendix E: Consent to Participate in a Research Study	268
Appendix F: Demographic Information.....	272
Appendix G: Letter to the Tribal Authorities (Chiefs)	274
Appendix H: Letter of Permission to Conduct Research in Botswana.....	277

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
TABLE 1 Focus Group-1 Characteristics.....	126
TABLE 2 Summary of Themes from Focus Group 1.....	148
TABLE 3 Recommendations to Policy Makers: Focus Group 1.....	149
TABLE 4 Focus Group II-Characteristics	150
TABLE 5 Summary of Themes from Focus Group II.....	174
TABLE 6 Widows Recommendation—Focus Group 1I.....	175
TABLE 7 Summary of themes from Key Informant 1 (Mama-T)	184
TABLE 8 Recommendations from Key Informant 1 (Mama-T).....	184
TABLE 9 Summary of Themes from Key Informant 2 (Same').....	188
TABLE 10 Recommendations from Key Informant 2 (Same').....	189
TABLE 11 Summary of Themes from Key Informant 3 (Joyce).....	191
TABLE 12 Recommendations from Key Informant 3 (Joyce).....	191
TABLE 13 Summary Table of Themes from Key Informant 4 (Botlhale)	194
TABLE 14 Recommendations Key Informant 4 (Botlhale)	194
TABLE 15 Summary of Themes from Key Informant 5 (Lulu)	196
TABLE 16 Recommendations from Key Informant 5 (Lulu)	196
TABLE 17 Summary of Themes from Key Informant 6 (Sarah).....	198
TABLE 18 Recommendations from Key Informant 6 (Sarah).....	199
TABLE 19 Summary of Themes from Key Informant 7 (Bongani)	201
TABLE 20 Recommendations from Key Informant 7 (Bongani)	202
TABLE 21 A Synthesis of Themes from all Participants.....	202

TABLE 22 Less Common Themes from Participants' Transcripts.....	204
TABLE 23 A Synthesis of Recommendations from all Participants.....	205

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The death of a husband in Botswana, prior to the last three decades, was something that was associated with elderly women who were beyond reproductive age. As such, there were cultural and age-specific ways of responding to this tragedy, and these responses were tailor-made to suit the population and the time period. These responses specifically refer to the cultural rituals that are a common tradition for the people of Botswana during the time of death.

Currently in Botswana there have been noticeable and drastic changes in the lives of *Batswana* (people of Botswana), some of which can be attributed to the consequences of modernization. One such consequence of modernization that has weighed heavily on the lives of Batswana is the advent of HIV/AIDS, which emerged in the early 1990s. To date in Botswana, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has accounted for innumerable numbers of deaths (UNAIDS, 2006) what Levers (2006) references as many talented and young people. This study focuses on widows who have been left behind by their husbands too soon and at the most productive time of their lives. The primary purpose of this study was to find out how widows in Botswana experienced cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement, as they mourned their husbands' death.

Due to influences of modern living on the lifestyles of Batswana, as well as advances in technology and science, the ancient or traditional response of employing only cultural rituals in providing care to grieving widows, may no longer be fitting and sufficient for present generations and the prevailing state of affairs. There needs to be an

up-to-date response to the event of death, one that is at par with contemporary lifestyles in Botswana. One such response that may have utility in this situation is counseling.

The professional counseling intervention is a scientific-based and Western approach, and a “relatively new phenomenon” (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999) in Botswana, but highly recognized in official circles in the country. However, it is not necessarily effective, as it falls short of fully addressing some of the major concerns that result from deeply buried traditional beliefs held by many of the indigenous people of Botswana. These cultural beliefs, even though generally dormant, do become vigorously animated in times of calamity, specifically when there is sickness or death of an adult member in the family.

One factor that will always push for the utility of cultural rituals in the lives of Batswana, is the commonly and strongly held belief in Botswana and most of Africa that, “nothing harmful ‘happens by chance;’ everything is caused by someone directly through the use of mystical power” (Mbiti, 1989, p. 195). Therefore, cultural rituals come into play to help the survivors find answers to the cause of death and to prevent further occurrences of a similar nature in the family. Cultural rituals are thus a protective mechanism. The use of either the counseling approach or cultural rituals without the other may not be adequate to address the complexities of life of a typical indigenous *Motswana* (singular for a Botswana citizen) living in a modern world, since the individual is affected by situations from both the modern and the traditional worlds.

Therefore, to provide a psychosocial service that is culturally sensitive and appropriate, and one that meets the needs of the people, and addresses their concerns from their world view, it is essential for professional counselors in Botswana to combine

the indigenous practices with Western-based counseling interventions. The Western-based interventions have earned high recognition in official circles in the country, but are outweighed by indigenous systems in that, although they have no place in official quarters, they continue to be highly practiced in the day-to-day lives of the indigenous people of Botswana.

Witmer (1990), a consultant for establishing a Guidance and Counseling Program for the University of Botswana, suggested combining the best of traditional medicine and family life as well as emerging human and social services of modernization to enhance the well-being of service users. Sentiments related to the combination of indigenous practices with Western-based approaches were expressed in major international conferences such as the American Counseling Association (ACA) Convention, 2006; Society for Student Counseling in Southern Africa (SSCSA) Conference, 2006 & 2007. Most significantly, authors such as Pedersen (1987) and Usher (1989) have questioned the usefulness of these originally Western methods with non-Western (African) clients. These sentiments and suggestions have influenced the focus of this research project.

A central question that guided this investigation was: How do widows in Botswana experience the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourn their husband's deaths? Another question that related directly to counseling sought to find out how the knowledge and insights gained from this study, could begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions. This qualitative study used an ethnographic approach.

This research relied largely on the developmental perspectives drawn from Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (1979; 2005), which accounts for a diversity of

individual and environmental factors, and Bowlby's (1977) attachment theory.

Bronfenbrenner, a pioneer in community dynamics, dedicated most of his career to describing how ecological factors had an impact on human development. Bowlby's (1977) attachment theory was also applied in this investigation, principally because "human beings have a tendency to make strong affectional bonds with others and develop negative emotional reactions when those bonds are threatened or broken."

(Worden, 2002, p. 7). These theories are discussed in detail in Chapter II.

In this chapter I presented an introduction of this investigation which entailed discussion of the geo-cultural background of Botswana and the British influences that remain in the country. The other sections that were addressed in this chapter include the importance of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research question, the rationale, the significance of the study, definition of terms, and the delimitations of the study. The organization of the entire dissertation is presented at the end of this chapter.

Background of the Problem

Geo-Cultural Background

Botswana is a landlocked country in the southern hemisphere of Africa. Formerly known as Bechuanaland, this country was a British Protectorate during the colonial era dating from the 1800s to the early 1960s (Parsons, 1998). During this period, a significant number of countries in Africa were subjected to European rule. However, the decade of the 1960s was marked by achievement of self-governance by many of these countries, when the colonial masters relinquished their power over these nations. Botswana was one of the countries that were granted her political sovereignty on the 30th day of September

1966. Since she gained independence, Botswana has maintained cordial diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom.

British Influence

The major consequence of British governance on the culture of Botswana was the assimilation of a substantial amount of British lifestyle including her educational principles. This lifestyle assimilation is visible on what one could describe as an ordinary day in Botswana. As a result, it may not be easy for a non-indigenous person to grasp a true picture of a *Motswana* on a non-eventful day.

The arrival of British settlers (Ngugi, 1986; Woodson, 1933) to colonize Bechuanaland in Africa and claim it as their own, also colonized Africa's knowledge base and disconnected Africans from their heritage and culture. The disconnection of Africans from their heritage is evident in what Ngugi (1986) describes as the "cultural bomb, which annihilates a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environments, in their heritage of a struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately themselves" (p. 3). Additionally, Hotep (n. d.) a website article; *Decolonizing the African Mind*, asserts that people who are cut off from their heritage and culture are more easily manipulated and controlled, than people who are not.

Since the arrival of the British missionaries like Robert Moffat and David Livingstone, to mention a few, (Gann & Duinam, 1969), the people of Botswana have allowed and continue to allow their indigenous knowledge to be replaced by new "pre-packaged alien knowledge and intervention strategies" from Western countries (Bhusumane, 2007, p. 8). This attitude can be attributed to what Boateng (1990) terms "deculturalization, a process by which the individual is deprived of his or her culture and

then conditioned to other cultural values” (p. 73). According to Goodenough (1976) anthropologists and sociologists define culture as a way of perceiving, believing, and evaluating. Therefore, culture provides a blueprint that determines the way an individual thinks, feels, and behaves in society (Boateng). Boateng, furthermore highlights that, to deculturalize an African child is to deprive them of that which determines the way they think, feel, and behave.

People who are protective of their heritage and culture, and are sure of their identity, would question any new or foreign knowledge before putting it into use. However, this has never been the case in Botswana; scholars have more often than not embraced foreign intervention programs and ideas without questioning their usefulness and applicability with indigenous people. Naturally, these programs have oftentimes yielded futile results. This attitude is well described by Kanjulu (2000) in his introduction to Woodson’s book, *Mis-Education of the Negro (2000)*.

Kanjulu states that Woodson knew almost a century ago, what many of us are beginning to understand now; that schools have two purposes for African (American) children; either destroy or indoctrinate them. Moreover, Kanjulu asserts that “for those that survive the destruction and acquire skills, they graduate believing that Greece preceded Egypt; white is better than black, and are more committed to the Fortune 500 than the black community” (p. viii). Accordingly, this manner of thinking is rampant in many Botswana and many other nations of Africa who experienced colonization.

The most recent imposition of ideas from the West, which was humbly embraced by Botswana without question, is that concerning efforts to curb the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which alarmingly have not produced results in accord with the effort expended by

program implementers. In reality, the programs created conflict and competition with the indigenous lifestyle and knowledge systems. As Chilisa (2005) highlights, knowledge of HIV/AIDS based on Western ways of knowing competes with knowledge produced by indigenous people. “....Since the latter constitutes suppressed knowledge, this leads to slow progress in curbing the HIV/AIDS epidemic,” (p. 680) as has been witnessed in Botswana. The aforementioned scholarship demonstrates the need to use knowledge and insights gained from this investigation to inform culturally sensitive and relevant psychosocial interventions.

Professional counseling was introduced in Botswana following a number of American consultants advising the country (e. g. Maes, 1995; Mapp-Robinson, 1987; Witmer, 1990). As might be expected, counseling was adopted by Botswana as a carbon copy of the programs in the United States without being tried out before actual implementation. Consequently, this professional intervention began to be viewed with suspicion, and to date, it continues to struggle for recognition and acceptance in the country. This is not to say that professional counseling cannot yield positive results, but its lack of success can be attributed to not considering the traditional structures that were already in place during its implementation. These traditional structures have always been a way of survival of the people. Thus, the manner in which the programs and ideas were introduced caused internal conflict for indigenous masses as well as with the program implementers.

Characteristically, when new knowledge was introduced, the indigenous knowledge structures and practices were merely pushed to the periphery, even though many scholars in the country were well aware of the strong faith and respect that

indigenous masses had in their traditional systems and practices. According to Ngugi (1989), “they (Batswana elite) see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland, it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance with other people’s (languages) culture, rather than their own” (p.3). However, the wasteland as regarded by the country’s elite has a greater influence on the lives of many indigenous Batswana. Medical anthropologists cited in Levers and Maki (2006), highlight this stance of indigenous people and their traditional structures suggesting that 80% of people in Africa use indigenous healing structures to meet their health needs.

This humble and unquestioning attitude of Batswana regarding the adoption of foreign knowledge and ideas can be attributed to the diligent and insidious teachings of the colonizers whose legacy, even though they have long departed Africa, continues to control the thinking, feelings and behavior of most Africans to the present day.

Bhusumane (2007) acknowledges that Western program developers tend to relegate the local peoples’ views, practices, beliefs, values, and knowledge systems to the past. This approach has not benefited either the program developers or the intended beneficiaries.

Bhusumane gives credence to the traditional systems, stating, “Interestingly, most of these community practices and systems were reported to have continued to remain part of the contemporary culture of these societies” (p. 8). With these views in mind, I argue that scholars in Botswana specifically, and those in Africa at large, need to change the colonial mindset regarding traditional structures and practices, and begin to appreciate and advocate for the invaluable resources inherent in cultural tradition.

Most importantly, there is a need to complement contemporary professional interventions with those parts of traditional structures that remain meaningful to indigenous people. This study sought to find out how widows in Botswana experienced the performance of cultural rituals as they mourned their husbands' death; and how the knowledge and insights gained from the results of the study can begin to inform culturally responsive and relevant psychosocial interventions.

It is an inescapable fact that the West has had a significant positive influence on the lives of Botswana through technological and scientific advancement. At the same time there is the need to appreciate that (Mbiti, 1989) belief dies slower than practice. Belief systems and traditional practices in African societies have long histories and are essential parts of the survival and well being of those societies. Foreign knowledge oftentimes conflicts with the lifestyle of indigenous people if other factors that have direct influence on their lives are not considered. Thus many indigenous people will continue to hold on to their belief system for a long time despite having been indoctrinated over many centuries to appreciate Western culture over and above their own.

Botswana counselors need to pay attention to their own belief system and that of clients, before wholly embracing new and foreign knowledge. This attitude of undervaluing one's own culture that is harbored by most Botswana, reflecting strong and negative attitudes implanted in a *Motswana's* (African) psyche by the British colonial masters. This attitude is succinctly described by renowned scholars as 'intellectual colonialism' (Hotep, n. d.; Ngugi, 1986; Spring, 1997), also popularly known as brain-washing.

The legacy of British colonizers, described above, resonates with what Woodson (1933) described as “miseducation” (p. 23) and by Boateng (1990) as “deculturalization” (p. 73). According to Woodson, the mis-educated people have an attitude of contempt towards their own people, because in schools they are taught to admire other cultures, like the Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans, and to despise the African. Deculturalization, “does not mean a loss of a group’s culture, but rather failure to acknowledge the existence of their culture and the role it plays in their behavior” (Boateng, 1990, p. 73). Deculturalization was the weapon that was used by the British missionaries to strip Batswana as well as many other Africans of their cultural heritage and it has had long term effects on their thinking, feeling, and behaviors regarding their lifestyle. Generally speaking, according to the Christian doctrine, partaking in traditional rituals of indigenous origins is viewed as a sinful behavior to this very day. This is the legacy of British colonial rulers disguised under the umbrella of Christianity, and it continues to control the manner of thinking and behavior of most, if not all Batswana, and many Africans that experienced imperialism.

Introduction of Christianity

The introduction of Christianity was aimed at civilizing what missionaries frequently described as the “Dark Continent” (Gunn & Duinam, 1969). During the process of so-called civilization, missionaries diligently and ingeniously discouraged Batswana, in the strongest terms possible, from observing any local indigenous knowledge systems (Some, 1999; Mutwa, 1999), as they did with most nations of Africa. The indigenous knowledge systems, beliefs, values, customs, and practices of Batswana were often described by missionaries as ... “unworthy, uncivilized, barbaric and

superstitious” (Chilisa 2005, p. 659). These derogatory descriptions were absorbed by Batswana and are now responsible for the shameful attitude that is prevalent in most of the country’s elite regarding their culture.

Christianity and Education

Christianity, disguised as education, played a major role in indoctrinating the minds of the most vulnerable and innocent members of the society—the children, who were to be the future leaders of Africa. *Catching Them Young* is a title of a book on racism, class, sex, and politics in Dixon (1978) children’s literature. According to Ngugi (1986), “Catching them young as an aim was even more true of a colonial child” because “the images of this world and his place in it implanted in a child take years to eradicate, if they ever can be” (p. 17). Hence the teachings of the missionaries have never been erased from the minds of the many generations of Africa to the present day.

Additionally, educational infrastructures established by Christian missionaries were conveniently erected several miles away from these children’s homes, requiring the children to stay at the institutions. This arrangement consequently enforced and accelerated the rate of extinction of any indigenous knowledge that was acquired by the child earlier on at home. Ngugi (1986) calls this arrangement “colonial alienation,” the educational context and content resulted in dissociation of children from their natural and social environment. Furthermore, Ngugi accentuates that this alienation was reinforced in subjects like history, geography, music, where bourgeois Europe was always the centre of the universe.

One profound and erroneous belief that was commonly held by many people in Botswana during the 1970s was that to be a real scholar one had to be far away from

home. One high school that I attended in Botswana established in the late 1960s was funded by the London Missionary Society and conveniently situated more than three hundred miles away from my village. Transportation in those days was limited and students could only visit their people after three months of schooling, to spend only four weeks of school recess with them.

Some' (1999) a renowned scholar of West African culture, reports that children in the school he attended were told that, "the rituals that their elders used for healing were inspired by the devil and barbaric in nature" (p. 7). Some' also expresses that he found it most difficult to relate to his people once he had been to school. This negative connotation about African traditional lifestyle was spread equally by school children and regular church-goers of the time, and continues to be rife in the minds of most, if not all Africans today.

As a product of the post-colonial education system, I particularly remember how, once I had been to high school, I could no longer sing and dance to *sangoma* songs, which were used in ceremonies of ancestral veneration within my family. I had naturally undertaken these ceremonies in the past as a part of my life and had no reason to question any of its aspects before I received a high school education. I was simply excused by my grandmother for this attitude as educated and now a "white product." I was beginning to lose respect for my traditional culture due to the indoctrination I was gradually absorbing at high school. Accordingly, I was slowly becoming a graduate of (Boateng, 1990; Ngugi, 1986) "miseducation" and "deculturalization," like many other young Africans who attended "formal education." Fanon (1952) describes this dichotomous attitude stating:

Every colonized people in other words in whose soul inferiority has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is the mother country. The civilized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle (p. 18).

Medium of Instruction in Schools

In all the schools that were established by Christian missionaries, the medium of instruction was English and has remained so to the present day. Thus, the curriculum emphasized the colonizer's lifestyle and language to the detriment of the local language and the indigenous people's lifestyle. This is the attitude that was described by Nobles (1986) as 'trivializing African culture' to advantage the white superior lifestyle.

Interestingly, this is still the position in all schools in Botswana and most English speaking countries in Africa. I remember in the 1960's during my elementary school years the bitter punishment that was imposed on us if we spoke in vernacular on the school grounds. A similar experience is noted by Ngugi (1986), "as most humiliating, was to be caught speaking *Gikuyu* (his language) in the vicinity of the school" (p. 11). He described a scenario where the culprit would be given corporal punishment of three to five strokes of the cane on bare buttocks - or was made to carry a metal plate around his neck with an inscription such as "I AM STUPID" OR "I AM A DONKEY" (p.11).

As a consequent of these violent floggings and humiliations, pupils learnt more English and became more comfortable to express themselves in this language than their own. It is not uncommon to hear a *Motswana* saying that they can speak, read, and write

English with greater ease than their own language—*Setswana*. Statements such as this indicate how local people look down upon their own language and consequently their traditional culture. Yet language is the only vehicle through which cultural values are communicated to younger generations. This inferior view of one's culture held by most African people was an intended action by the British colonial masters.

In addition, Chilisa's (2005) article clearly depicts the attitude of inferiority regarding traditional culture when she says that even though Botswana achieved her 'geographical and political' sovereignty, like many African countries, it seems that she has not gained cultural independence. Chilisa (2005, p. 650) further stresses that "years after the struggle for independence, the content of what is taught, methods of teaching remain Western in a non-Western world." Chilisa's argument further highlights the manner in which Botswana continues to mimic the lifestyle of the colonizer and still depends on the Western world for her educational principles, several years after she declared freedom from colonial rule.

Notably, there are very few, if any, scholars in Botswana, who are ready to question the new Western ideas, let alone examine how they can be used appropriately to complement what is already in place. Such a move would elicit criticism from other scholars and be perceived as an indication of lack of civilization or education on the part of the concerned scholar.

Some' (1999, p. 6) drew a parallel to Chilisa's point of view when he said that, "colonization did not leave Africa, it only changed its face." Nobles (1986) describes further this disguised face of colonization as "conceptual incarceration" or black imprisonment in white belief system and knowledge bases. Most Africans remain locked

up the in the colonial syndrome that was imposed upon them by the white colonial masters. These highlights have motivated the focus of this study; and it is anticipated that the results of this investigation will enhance a paradigm shift for both the elite and the average citizens in Botswana, regarding the utility of traditional structures, knowledge, and practices.

Misconceptions about Education

There is a universal misconception in Botswana and most of Africa, that to be educated through the formal Western system is to be elevated above the cultural norms and practices. Hence the elite are commonly referred as those “*who have been to...or those whose palms were thrashed.*” This notion of superiority causes the elite to be ambivalent about the use of indigenous structures. Oftentimes, they pretend that they do not subscribe to traditional cultural values only doing so in grave secrecy, when faced with major crises of life, such as sickness or death of a family member. Evidence has shown that the Western educated elite do subscribe to cultural practices sometimes, whereas the majority of people with little or no formal education subscribe fully to their traditional beliefs and practices as a basic way of life (Mbiti, 1989).

The irony here is that people with little or no formal education, are much more at liberty to conduct their lives without any hindrances, as compared to the elite who are supposed to be guided by the concept of “academic freedom” yet remain mentally incarcerated. As long as professional counselors in Botswana do not rid themselves of these erroneous perceptions of ‘being educated,’ they may not reach out to clients who have not had the opportunity to be ‘educated.’ On this notion Woodson (1933, p. ix) poses rhetorical questions such as, “educated to do what? Educated to work for whom?”

These are questions that professional counselors in Botswana need to ask themselves in order to develop good working relationships with the indigenous masses. There is a need to bridge the conceptual gap that exists between educated (professionals) and the non-educated (clients), to provide a service that is effective and responds to clients' concerns from their own frame of reference, and resonates with their lifestyle.

The derogatory attitude regarding traditional culture that was instilled by missionaries upon the (Motswana) African psyche specifically the Western educated elite, torch-bearers of society), explains the lack of recognition about Botswana indigenous knowledge systems in the professional world and the lives of Botswana in general. Professionals in Botswana either are not ready to question this prevailing situation, or they are naïve of its prevalence, because it has been engrained in their psyche that anything associated with indigenous systems is inferior, uncivilized, and evil; (Levers, 2006; Mutwa, 1998; Some', 1999).

Accordingly, the elite cannot be seen engaging in activities of such "low" societal levels. They undertake traditional practices in secrecy or in places that are remote to their workplace and home, and hope that nobody ever knows about their cultural involvement. This is what Chilisa (2005) refers to as the *colonial syndrome* that is predominant in Botswana and most of Africa and is still perpetuated from one generation to the other. The torch-bearers of society or the elite continue to view the world through colonial lenses several decades after the colonial masters departed Africa. Professional counselors are challenged to change this colonial way of thinking in order to operate within the realities of the present era, and at a more highly developed level of service provision. To

change the present mindset of the African elite, a process described by Hotep (n. d.) as “decolonization of the mind” can be an appropriate intervention.

Decolonization of the mind is journey of self-discovery culminating in a re-awakening and a re-orientation. It involves a conscious decision to first uncover, uproot, and remove all vestiges of slavery-imposed European or Arab values and beliefs ingested over centuries of miseducation that are detrimental to present day African community empowerment.

Professional counselors in Botswana and all of Africa need to begin a process of self-discovery, as regards their traditional culture and heritage in order to map their way to the future and to liberated heights. It is only when people begin to appreciate the value and power intrinsic in their culture that they can take time to analyze foreign ideas and decide whether to use them to complement indigenous knowledge or reject the new ideas and preserve what they possess. Without this self-discovery and a sense of identity, counselors in Botswana may not be able to serve clients effectively if they continually disregard cultural beliefs and practices in their service provision. These beliefs and practices are an intricate part of life for a *Motswana* and have been passed from one generation to the other over many centuries and cannot be erased from their biographies overnight.

It is critical to note that Western-based interventions have often failed to fit into the day-to-day realities and experiences of Botswana, because the interventions are informed by theoretical models that disregard indigenous wisdom and, consequently, do not resonate with client concerns and worldviews. Conversely, the traditional approach that entails the performance of cultural rituals, if discharged in isolation from the

professional interventions, may not be adequate to address the concerns of modern living that are complicated by advancement in technology and science.

This investigation sought to find out how widows in Botswana experienced the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement while mourning the death of their husbands. The study also sought to explore aspects of rituals that enhanced or hindered healing in widows. Another question that had direct implications for counseling was: How can insights and knowledge gained from the results of this research begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

Statement of the Problem

There are two approaches of providing care to widows mourning the loss of their husbands to death in Botswana. One is the traditional approach, which entails the performance of cultural rituals, and the other is professional counseling intervention, a scientific and Western-based approach. These approaches are offered alongside each other by different service providers who do not collaborate in their care-giving. This behavior of service providers is indicative of fragmented service.

Cultural rituals are initial behaviors and actions that are socially mandated, and play a major role during the early days of mourning for both the widow and her community. According to Worden (2002), quite often this is the time that the widow may still be in a state of shock and struggling to come to terms with the reality of death. Additionally, she also may be experiencing a myriad of feelings associated with loss (Worden, 2002; Wolfelt, n. d.). This would be the most appropriate time to offer professional counseling for the new widow in addition to the traditional interventions that are already in place. Cultural rituals alone may not suffice to address all the concerns the

widow may have, particularly at the time that death is still unbelievable and raw in her mind. An awareness session regarding the feelings associated with loss due to death can be well fitted into the funeral program during these early days of mourning.

The traditional approach to care for grieving widows has been in operation since time immemorial, and is always undertaken by elderly women. As such this approach may not be adequate in addressing the multiple and complex problems of modern life, with which widows in the present era might be faced. The care of the widow is predominantly an “old women’s” arena, even in the present era in which Botswana has witnessed countless numbers of deaths of younger men. As a result there are many younger widows than was the case in the past. These widows are not only younger but also live in modern times where there is a lot of influence from the Western world, education, science, and technology.

As Millar (2004) aptly put it, “Africa is changing fast and there exists a mix of dominantly traditional, dominantly modern, and more hybrid subcultures” (p. 4). Millar also observed that, “nowadays, thinking among Africans ranges from traditional to modern, but in many cases both systems of thinking can be observed parallel to each other”(p. 1). It is mainly for such reasons that both the traditional and contemporary psychosocial interventions need to be combined in providing care to grieving widows.

It is also important to note that these young widows may not only feel out of place in the presence of elderly people, but may have issues and concerns better understood by people of their own generation. Most counselors in Botswana are young to middle-aged, but are mature enough to offer the necessary care to widows. Some of these counselors are widows themselves; thus they can strongly relate to the experiences of the newly

widowed. Consequently, care-giving in bereavement can no longer be defined as an arena only for “old women,” in the present state of affairs.

The counseling intervention on the other hand, is a highly scientific Western-based approach which is still striving for recognition in Botswana. The counseling service also is available only in cities and towns, and some big villages in the country, and limited to unavailable in the smaller villages and remote settlements. As a result, many people do not understand its objectives and functions, particularly because counselors may be much younger people and also uphold a Western Approach to resolving problems. This attitude reflects traditional thinking in that care-giving in Botswana, and most of Africa, is viewed as a role for the elderly. Correspondingly, when it comes to matters of bereavement, most people in Botswana, both the bereaved and the mourners, feel more comfortable when services are provided by older persons.

As a Western-based approach, the professional counseling intervention rightly promotes individualism and confidentiality, which are basic ways of life in the Western countries. However, experience teaches us that confidentiality is perceived as *secrecy* by Africans; individualism completely contrasts to the community-oriented way of life of most indigenous Africans. Confidentiality in an African context can be understood as everybody knowing about an issue, but not discussing it unnecessarily, and everybody is willing to help the identified person based on this knowledge. It can therefore be assumed that due to the individualism and confidentiality with which counseling is practiced, the counseling service may be viewed with suspicion. The way counseling has been applied with indigenous masses can account for reasons it is not readily accepted by many people, as it disregards their lifestyles and belief system.

As a community-oriented people, Batswana are particularly possessive and protective of their bereaved relatives specifically during the active mourning period. This is evident in the way in which the elderly ladies spend hours on end surrounding the widow during her active mourning period. The widow is never left alone. In view of this, should a counselor take the widow aside for a counseling session, it would cause mourners and elders to be suspicious of the counselor's behavior, and they would also be perturbed that the *lying-in* has been interrupted, and they (elders) have been undermined.

However, a counseling session can be possible and acceptable to elders if a space is created for dialogue between traditional care providers and professional counselors. This still poses a challenge for professional counselors in Botswana to combine the two approaches—the traditional practices and counseling in providing care to grieving widows. With particular reference to the above notation, the present study aimed to find out how the results of this investigation could assist counselors in Botswana to include traditional structures and practices in professional interventions while providing care to grieving widows and also ensure proper follow-up care.

Generally, after burial there is follow-up care to the widow and her family, which entails visitations by religious ministers, friends, relatives, and elderly women who ensure that taboos are strictly observed during mourning—post-burial. This is the time that counselors can visit with the widow to offer support. The counseling profession as a scientific approach has clearly laid out stages of the intervention process (Egan, 2004), from the very first meeting, through the working stage to the termination stage. Therefore it is critical that the professional and the traditional service providers collaborate to

ensure an adequate, updated, and smooth care that addresses all the concerns of the grieving widow and maintains a uniform follow-up care.

Widows in Botswana live in both the traditional and the modern world.

Bhusumane, (2007) states that “many people in Botswana still use indigenous practices and structures to address mental health needs; however Western cultural influence and increasing technology and science has had a significant influence on life in Botswana” (p. 8). Consequently, there is a high possibility that “the thinking (for most grieving widows in Botswana) ranges from traditional to modern or both systems of thinking operate parallel to each other” (Millar, 2004, p. 1). Hence widows’ care and concerns should be considered from both the traditional aspect as well as the scientific approach, which is professional counseling intervention.

Importance of the Study

There is limited research in Botswana that addresses specifically the traditional way of life of this people in regard to rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement which boast of a powerful healing mechanism. In the daily lives of Botswana there is little discussion, if any, concerning matters of death, including related cultural rituals. Cultural rituals are primarily held in high regards and are the initial response to death by most, if not all, indigenous people of Botswana. The study will bring the subject of death up for discussion in public forums.

Findings from this investigation can encourage scholars in Botswana, as well as average citizens, to openly discuss their culture and matters relating to death; which the society of Botswana continues to be solemnly silent about. The results of this inquiry can also assist in converting the attitude of inferiority harbored by most indigenous people of

Botswana to a stance of appreciation and pride regarding their cultural tradition. These attitudes of inferiority are a legacy of the British colonial masters.

There are countless examples of historical records that depict the offensive notations of the missionaries regarding traditional African lifestyles and practices. One such good example is the description of the Ngoni people of Malawi (then Nyasaland) by Mott (1957) in his introduction of the book, *Winning a Primitive People*. These historical documents that were produced by missionaries vividly reveal that the impetus behind introduction of Christianity was to bring about a “new order” which was “civilization,” suggesting that the Christian religion was indeed pure and superior to African creeds and lifestyle. Some’ (1999) supports this superior attitude of the missionaries stating that “this foreign culture was presented as high culture par excellence of which constituted a blessing” (p. 11).

Based on these distorted historical records and the resultant Botswana’s prevailing negative attitude towards their culture, this inquiry is significant for the two following reasons: (a) to support the principles of the *Botswana National Policy on Culture* (2001), and (b) to produce authentic records concerning traditional cultural practices that are respectful of indigenous people and also sensitive to their traditional lifestyles. In this way, both scholars and average citizens may begin to develop positive views regarding their culture, be able to clearly define who they are, admire their cultural values, and begin to promote a much more open or non-secretive use of these traditional knowledge systems in their day-to-day lives.

Specifically, this investigation supports the two principles in the *Botswana National Policy on Culture* (2001) which are: “To re-awake in the people of Botswana an

appreciation of, and respect for their own culture, in order to reinforce a source of national unity, to strengthen their sense of identity, thus sensitizing Botswana to the need to assimilate innovation within the context of their own culture” (p. 10)...and that “(t)he Ministry of Education stands out visibly, as the principal public agency for enculturation through its formal school curriculum and associated extracurricular programs” (p. 13). These two principles were selected to support this research, because they address a deliberate revival of the traditional structures and practices of the indigenous people of Botswana, and also redirect the functions of the Ministry of Education to begin to incorporate traditional values into the school curriculum.

The present educational system in Botswana was described earlier on as a facsimile of the previous colonial education system, which did not consider the traditional lifestyle of the colonized in its curriculum. This study can influence a change in the design of Botswana’s educational curricula. In this way both scholars and other average citizens may begin to develop positive views of their culture, by identifying and upholding its values and promoting it in their day-to-day lives.

As a result of the negative undertones and misconceptions of the missionaries concerning their traditional lifestyle, a sizable number of scholars in Botswana cannot openly discuss their culture or even conduct scholarly work on it because of the low social position that traditional structures have been accorded. The insights generated from this research can guide counselors in Botswana to change their colonial mindset and begin to re-consider aspects of Botswana culture that are meaningful to the people they serve, and incorporate these aspects into psychosocial interventions. The results of this

inquiry can also encourage research and scholarly work on the subjects of death and the traditional culture of Botswana.

Finally, there are no documented research findings concerning the experiences of indigenous people of Botswana in relation to counseling. This inquiry can challenge counselors to conduct more investigations that will depict the effectiveness of the counseling approach to issues experienced by Batswana.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was two-fold: First, the study sought to portray how widows mourning the death of their husbands experienced the performance of the indigenous cultural rituals as a vehicle towards healing from grief. Second, the study intended to reveal how the insight and knowledge gained from the results of this inquiry can begin to inform culturally sensitive and appropriate psychosocial interventions. The results of the study can also assist in guiding counselors in Botswana in deciding on ways to include the indigenous approach to care for grieving widows within the professional counseling intervention.

Research Question

A central question that guided this study was: What are lived experiences of widows in Botswana regarding the performance of the indigenous cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement? What aspects of the rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows during mourning? A question that had direct implications for counseling was: How can the knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive client interventions?

Rationale

There are countless studies in the literature worldwide which attest to the healing power inherent in cultural rituals in times of death. Most of this information is derived from developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Jeffreys, 2005; Parkes, 1996; Walsh-Burke 2006; Worden, 1982,). Although these findings provide valuable insights, they may not be useful to African clients unless they are modified to suit their culture, lifestyle, and system of beliefs, as well as their socio-economic standards.

There is, however, some newly emerging research and literature in Africa, (Denbow & Thebe, 2006; Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Nwoye, 2005) relating to rituals of death, but none that specifically address the experiences of widows in relation to the utility of indigenous structures and practices in the face of death. This study first sought to illuminate the experiences of widows in Botswana, in relation to the performance of indigenous cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement; and secondly, how these cultural structures and practices assist widows towards healing following loss of their husbands to death.

A majority, if not all widows in Botswana, undertake rituals of death as a filial and social obligation, as well as to achieve healing following the death of their husbands. Their experiences concerning the performance and their involvement with the rituals of death are generally disseminated as oral literature, but not documented in the body of literature in Botswana. This research can ensure a scholarly record in this particular area. The general perspective held about rituals is that they boast a powerful healing force in

the face of death, loss, grief, and bereavement, although it is still not known how effective these rituals are in assisting widows in Botswana towards healing.

To be able to combine traditional structures and practices with professional counseling interventions appropriately, it is important to have an awareness of how widows experience the performance of cultural rituals as they mourn the deaths of their husbands. In this way valuable aspects of cultural death rituals can be identified and included into counseling interventions, this will ensure the provision of a well-rounded service to the client, which encompasses their most pressing needs.

Significance of the Study

This study examining the experiences of widows regarding the utility of traditional rituals can contribute to the body of knowledge in Botswana, Africa, and other parts of the world. It is anticipated that the results of this study can ensure documentation regarding death which remains a gravely private and taboo-ridden subject in Botswana and most of Africa. Thus, the topic of death will be brought for open discussion in a public arena. The traditional culture can also be discussed in academic as well as public forums. The lack of documentation on the subject of death and lifestyle in Botswana heightens the need and importance of conducting this investigation.

The understanding and knowledge that can be gained from the findings of this investigation regarding the experiences of widows in relation to the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement, can provide unique and additional insights to professional counselors. These insights can aid professional counselors in meeting widows' needs and providing appropriate and comprehensive care to widows during mourning.

Numerous studies have been conducted on the effects of professional counseling interventions and care of widows in many parts of the developed world (e. g. Australia, the United Kingdom, and United States of America). However, there is still limited documentation of research studies that address how indigenous knowledge systems and practices in Botswana, assist widows towards healing from the loss of their husbands to death.

Furthermore, in developing countries like Botswana research studies were generally focused on society's elite oftentimes excluding those who have little or no formal education—the population well-vest with knowledge of indigenous systems and practices. Additionally, this segment of society is the most culturally inclined, in most societies of the world, and always preserve the society's cultural standards. Mbiti (1989), in the preface of his book, *African Religions and Philosophy*, supports this statement indicating that the “majority of people with little or no formal education still hold onto their traditional corpus of beliefs and practices” (p. xi). Extending this study to a population of average citizens can assist in illuminating the richness of the culture and thus enable the design of culturally sensitive, comprehensive intervention approaches and care programs for grieving widows in Botswana and Africa at large.

As a developing country, Botswana has for many decades depended for her knowledge base on foreign cultures, especially those of the Western world. This is a widespread phenomena prevailing in most African countries that encountered colonization. This foreign-generated knowledge base has not met the psychosocial needs of the people of Botswana and Africa due to obvious lifestyle differences between people in the West and those in Africa. The need to generate culturally appropriate and sensitive

interventions that meet the needs and aspirations of Batswana is critical at this point in time. I specifically describe this period as an ‘era of Cultural Revolution’ in which several African scholars are challenging their fellow intellectuals and average citizens to appreciate and own their cultural heritage. Such writers include, but are not limited to Chilisa, (2005); Mazrui, (1990); Mbiti, (1968); Ngugi, (1968); Mutwa, (1998), and Some’ (1999).

Solomon and Wane (2005) concur with this stance when they mention that, “many of us are beginning to more fully recognize that the ancient ways of our ancestors are valuable, and more sustainable than the present-day methods of living in the universe (p. 6).” Additionally, documented research studies regarding grieving widows are drawn from experiences of people in the developed Western world. Owing to vivid cultural variations between the Western and African cultures, the applicability of these Western intervention approaches with African clients remains questionable (Spangenberg, 2003). It is imperative to study cultural mechanisms and approaches in the widow’s country of decent (in this case—Botswana) to ensure applicability of the investigation’s results to the populace of interest.

This research can illuminate the significance and utility of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement, as well as the respect paid to these indigenous structures by the local people. It is anticipated that the results of this research can attest to the healing power inherent in traditional structures and practices. Professional counselors, counselor educators and supervisors, counselor trainees, researchers, policy makers in Botswana, and professionals in Africa as well as other parts of the world can find the

study useful in generating new knowledge which is also culturally appropriate and sensitive in addressing the needs of the indigenous people.

The study will also pose challenges and open avenues for further inquiries into the subject of death, traditional culture, and other related issues. It is anticipated that the study can reveal some of the limitations inherent in contemporary professional counseling interventions concerning traditional culture and the lifestyles of Batswana. The importance of culturally relevant intervention strategies is supported by Levers (2006), arguing that the framework of African traditional healing offers another system of indigenous knowledge, and further urges the African counselors to re-consider the cultural relevance of this indigenous knowledge system.

The study can influence a curriculum design for counselor education and supervision programs in Botswana that incorporates traditional culture into its programs. The results of this research have implications for both counselor training and supervision programs. The incorporation of traditional culture hopefully, will infiltrate into national educational programs in the country, and into the general lives of Batswana and many other peoples of Southern Africa. In particular, the study can enhance the application of the principles of the *Botswana National Policy on Culture* (2001).

Definition of Terms

There are a number of terms that need to be defined to suit the framework of this study. These are; Batswana, black attire, *boswagadi*, Botswana, caregiver, elder, *kraal*, *letsididi*, lying-in, traditional healer, spiritual healer, green or navy blue attire, *sangoma*, *senyama*, *seriti* and *seromo*.

Batswana - People of Botswana.

Black attire - colors of mourning used by the members of the Protestant Churches in Southern Africa.

Botswana - the land of the Batswana in Southern Africa.

Boswagadi - defilement from the death of a husband or untoward polluting spirit.

Caregiver – an elderly woman previously widowed, who offers physical, social and emotional support to the widow during the *lying-in* period.

Closed house - a house where the belongings of the deceased are kept until the day of cleansing, when they are shared among relatives. It is not used until ritually opened and lit.

Elder – a person in the community bestowed with respect and honor and wisdom, and supernatural powers that he or she possesses. Sometimes, this person may not necessarily be older in terms of age.

Green or navy blue attire - colors of mourning used by members of the African Independent Church Movement.

Kraal – is a smaller section of the village or community consisting of members of the same clan.

Ikalanga - language of the Bakalanga

Bakalanga - one of the ethnic groups in Botswana occupying most of the North East District and parts of the Central District.

Lighting and opening the house - a ritual act of opening a house that was closed-in since death, and literally lighting a lamp, the aim is to remove the *senyama*.

Lashisiwa - (*Ikalanga* word), literally meaning to be assisted to *throw away*...it means to be transformed from the pollution-prone widow to a pollution-free one (a symbolic act).

Letsididi – a pronunciation of healing at the end of all the funeral processes at the homestead of the deceased immediately after the burial, usually done by the village headman.

Motswana - (singular) refers to a citizen of Botswana, regardless of gender.

Lying-in –lying down in a prone position either on the floor bed or mattress by the widow, immediately following the death of her husband, until the burial has taken place. It is believed that this position will help soften the burial ground for digging.

Palila - (Ikalanga word) symbolically mark the grave site, using a backward kick also done as to conveying the last goodbyes at burial.

Traditional healer – an indigenous shaman with powers of fore-telling the future and uses herbs to cure ailments.

Senyama- (connoting blackness) is untoward spirit associated with bad luck following death of a husband, usually removed through ritual cleansing

Seriti- (vaporous shadow) - an untoward spiritual presence of the deceased.

Seromo - obesity or mysterious skin rash associated with death defilement usually seen in a non-traditionally cleansed widow.

Setswana – a language of the people of Botswana

Sangoma - a traditional healer of the Ndebele or the Zulu ethnic groups.

Spiritual healer – a fortune teller who uses bible verses to read into the future and also provide healing by use of holy water treated with some chemicals.

Delimitations of the study

This research focused only on widows who had completed all the mourning rites and gone through the cleansing ceremony; a period from six months to five years had

elapsed since their husbands died. These widows should be sanctioned as chief mourners by their elders, and still in a relatively good relationship with their spouse at the time of death. The age bracket for participants was 35-55 years. All widows were interviewed in a focus group. The investigation focused on the population of widows of Bakalanga descent. The Bakalanga ethnic group was selected deliberately to avoid too many discrepancies in the findings, since Botswana is a multiethnic country. Cultural behaviors, though basically homogenous, are bound to have minor, but multiple differences. Key informants were selected from the focus group because they were identified as articulate and open to discussing their experiences in relation to the cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement. The same criterion was used to identify the other four from the village who did not participate in focus group discussion, but were willing to be interviewed individually as key informants.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this chapter I have presented an introduction of the investigation by discussing the response to death by people of Botswana. The culture of the Botswana is generally subtle, and becomes vibrant in times of distress. This subtle behavior that is generally displayed by Botswana concerning their traditional culture is attributed to the negative influence of the British missionaries that has hung on, in the minds of the local citizens since the colonization era in the 1800s. This chapter also discusses the allegiance of indigenous people to their cultural structures and practices, as well as the position of counseling in relation to the lifestyle of indigenous Botswana. The counseling profession does not consider traditional structures and knowledge in its service provision, and as such may not meet the needs of indigenous clients. Professional counseling intervention

falls short of salient aspects regarding the beliefs, behaviors, and thinking of the served populace. Included in this chapter is the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, significance of the study, rationale, and the delimitations of the study. The definition of terms has been provided in the context of the investigation.

Chapter II presented the literature review as regards the functions of rituals, and the healing power therein. The chronological stages of death rituals of the Bakalanga tribe have been discussed as a representation of the Botswana society. Even though the literature is drawn from international literature, it presents the universal roles played universally, by rituals of death, loss, grief and bereavement, following the loss of a husband to death. The literature also reveals that there is need for more research studies, which address the combination of traditional practices and professional counseling intervention. The major theoretical underpinnings guiding this study have also been discussed.

Chapter III presented the methodology guiding this investigation, and discusses how qualitative research with an ethnographic approach supports the research question. Chapter IV presented the results of the inquiry by discussing themes that emerged from participants' transcriptions, and chapter V discussed the findings of the study and their implication for the counseling profession in Botswana. Recommendations for future research have been discussed and the hypotheses generated for the study have been presented.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter was intended to achieve the following goals: First, to highlight theoretical underpinnings related to this study (i.e., attachment theory, Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model, and the tasks of mourning); and second, to describe universal responses to death, as well as those displayed by Batswana. The effects of cultural rituals on healing have been presented, the meaning of death to the family has been discussed, and the tripartite stage process has been addressed, also. The chronological sequences of the stages of cultural rituals that are observed by the Bakalanga, following death of a husband have been detailed. The Bakalanga ethnic group was selected and discussed as a representation of the society of Botswana.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Three major theories are emphasized in the framework of this study, these are: attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 2005), and the tasks of mourning (Worden, 1982; 2002). These specific theories are given a special emphasis due to their consideration of the individual as situated within a larger context. Humans and their lived experiences are contextualized, and thus become complex particularly in difficult situations such as death of a loved one. Applying one theory only or a theory that is exclusively individualistic would not be sufficient to encompass this complexity and dynamism of the human organism in times of crisis.

Attachment Theory

Generally speaking, attachment theory is a psychological and ethnological theory, which provides a descriptive and an explanatory framework for the discussion of

interpersonal relationships. Ethnology is the study of ethnic groups. This study has its main focus on the Bakalanga ethnic group during bereavement, which makes this theory very fitting for application in this section of the investigation. For all practical purposes, the theory originated in the work of John Bowlby, a psychiatrist who lived and worked between the years of 1909 to 1990.

Bowlby came from a psychoanalytic background. He emphasized early infant-caregiver relationships as a source of adult personality. However he felt that actual events not fantasy, were crucial in the life of a developing child. In his research, he adopted an ethnological theory and approach, with specific emphasis on the study of animals in their natural environment-based on evolution. He then translated this insight to humans. Bowlby studied the effects on infants who were separated from their mothers, in hospitals and orphanages.

Based on his conclusions, attachment can be rightly defined also as bonding. According to Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary (2000), the term human bond or more generally human bonding, refers to the process of formation of a close personal relationship between a parent and a child, through frequent or constant association. Not limited to the above, the term "bonding" can be aptly applied to all variations of connections within interpersonal relationships, social networks, and family connections.

In Bowlby's approach, the infant has a need for a secured relationship with adult caregivers, without which normal social development will not occur. However, different relationship experiences can lead to different developmental outcomes. A number of attachment styles in infants, with distinct characteristics have been identified known as avoidant attachment, anxious attachment, and disorganized attachment (Ainsworth,

1978). All the above are said to be measurable in both infants and adults. In terms of infants, it is a process of proximity seeking, to an identified figure in situations of distress or alarm. Infants become attached to adults who are sensitive.

In terms of grief and bereavement therefore, attachment theory leads us to expect that the loss of an attachment figure will be an important and troubling event, especially to the extent that a person is emotionally dependent on the lost attachment figure (Shaver & Tancredy, 2001).

Ainsworth (1978) in her attempt to extend Bowlby's theory, she observed infant-mother pairs in Uganda-Africa, and suggested that the quality of an infant's attachment is modulated by the sensitivity of the mother. Additionally, Freud (1917) postulated that as infants mature, they develop cognitive models of their relationship with their primary caregivers, and these then guide behavior throughout life.

A particular attachment style that is worth mentioning here is evident in most countries in Africa. In Botswana, for example, as soon the baby is born, he or she is immediately taken to the mother for breastfeeding. The infant also shares the bed with its mother, most of the time at this tender age. At the age of about three or four months, the baby is carried by his or her mother on her back while she undertakes some household chores. This is to ensure constant observation and physical contact. When the baby falls asleep he or she is then taken to bed. At the age of about three to four years, the child is weaned gradually from sharing a bed with her mother, but continues to share the bedroom with his or her parents.

Twenty to thirty years ago in Botswana, when life was not as demanding as it is today, the mother lay in confinement for her baby up to a period of at least, three to six

months post partum. During this period, the baby received undivided attention from the mother. This personal closeness and contact ensured deeper attachment levels between infant and mother, which have implications for adult behavior.

During relaxed times, the baby is always held on the mother or father's lap, or that of an older sibling; this enhances and sustains the child-caregiver closeness. For the sake of comparison, in Western cultures, experience teaches us that as soon as the baby is born, he or she sleeps alone in a crib and in his or her own bedroom. The child gets frequent observations from parents. Moreover, these babies are carried in push-carts wherever the parents go, and sleep in carry baskets whenever the parents are relaxed. These different attachments styles have implications on how each child will react to loss or separation later in their life.

Theoretically, one can safely say that attachment was concisely and profoundly developed with great implications for loss, grief, and bereavement by Bowlby-once a recognized psychiatrist. Bowlby's contribution enhanced the academic world's understanding of *not* only the theoretical aspect of attachment, but also its practical significance and implications especially, concerning the development of attachment and affectional bonds between and among individuals.

Bowlby (1979) also elaborated upon and extended the notions that Freud supported about human attachment and loss. Bowlby proposed that attachment behavior of infants toward their caregivers helps them establish a sense of security throughout their life. He observed that infants and children reach out with searching behavior when separated from a significant person; in his era defined as the mother, in an attempt to re-establish bond and sense of security that the presence of the caregiver provides.

According to Bowlby's theory, the grief reaction of the bereaved to the loss of a significant other is a similar process. Furthermore, both Freud and Bowlby proposed that the bereaved must cease investing energy (referred to as *libido*), in the deceased in order to invest in other relationships. Bowlby noted that, just like the infant who continues to search for the significant other, grieving individuals might try to avoid or deny the reality of separation that death imposes.

The emotion model adapted from Shaver, Schwartz, Kirson, and O'Connor, (1987); and Fischer, Shaver, and Carnochan, (1990) is an important framework that portrays how a loss is unconsciously appraised in relation to the needs, wishes, goals, and sometimes concerns of the bereaved. In terms of children, if a child loses one of his or her parents, the intensity of grief reaction and or responses may be determined by the extent to which the parent was perceived by the child to be their source of protection and security; in other words the child's primary figure, or one that he or she was bonded with. Shaver & Tancredy (p. 75) concisely stated that in a prototypical attachment, the child relies on the attachment figure whom Bowlby characterized as a "stronger, wiser" other for protection (i.e. "safe haven" and "secure base" in theory's terms). This is why, as Bowlby (1979) explained, the "natural tendencies and behavior following separation and loss include search, protest, calling, pleading, and berating" (p. 75).

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

The bioecological model of human development developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) acknowledges that humans do not develop in isolation, but in relation to their family home, school, community, and society. Each of these ever-changing and multi-level environments and the interactions among these environments are keys to

development. Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework is preferred for this investigation regarding the experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to the performance of rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement; because it supports a broader perspective of the individual's life in relation to both the proximal and distal environments. The bio-ecological model itself is appropriate for the society of Botswana, since an individual in this community, is part of the larger whole, and depends on the environment for social relations and support specifically, in difficult times-such as death of a significant family member.

The human bioecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) focuses on the interrelationships and interactions between human beings and their various environments. Bronfenbrenner further describes a set of "nested structures" each inside of the next as the micro, meso, exo, and the macrosystems of human development. These hierarchical structures operate as systems both within themselves and in relation to each other (Bronfenbrenner).

In the context Botswana, the family being in the centre-the micro system, and nested within the surrounding structures; here being the relatives, the neighbors, the community at large including their expectations for the family. These social expectations which are inclined to being more of obligations include the undertaking of cultural rituals and observing the relevant cultural norms. The ecological framework posits that development does not take place in a vacuum, but is embedded and expressed through behavior in a particular environmental context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the framework of the ecological model therefore, the response to death in Botswana is formed in relation to this people's life experiences. Understanding interrelationships as presented in the

bioecological model can assist counselors to intervene with a much broader perspective to clients' concerns or life situations.

Universal Responses to Death

Tasks of Mourning

The framework for mourning proposed by Worden (1982; 2002) emphasizes that mourners need to fully participate and complete grief work for them to achieve healing. Failure to complete these tasks can result in several types of complicated mourning. As mentioned earlier, the bereaved will in one way or another and on their own, walk the steps necessary to achieving healing. Moreover, Worden (2002) states that these tasks will not necessarily be completed in a linear fashion or within any prescribed period of time. Each task is undertaken on individual basis.

Worden (1982; 2002), postulates that there are four tasks of mourning that the bereaved person needs to go through to achieve healing from grief, and are described as follows: Task I, requires that the bereaved person accepts the reality of the loss; to come to full face with the reality that the person is dead, and that the person is gone and will not return. Part of the acceptance of reality is to come to the belief that the reunion is impossible, at least in this life. The burial ceremony specifically, is proof that the deceased has permanently departed this world.

Task II entails working through the pain of grief. It is necessary to acknowledge and work through the pain of loss, or it can manifest itself through psychosomatic symptoms or some form of aberrant behavior. Writers in grief studies encourage bereaved persons, to 'lean into the pain' preferably with a sober mind, avoiding the use of

sedatives or tranquilizers which only mask the pain, only to manifest later as psychological symptoms (Bertman, 1999; Jeffreys, 2005; Worden, 2002).

Task III, involves adjusting to an environment in which the deceased is missing; included under this task, are three areas of adjustment that one needs to make after losing a loved one to death. These are: (a) the *external adjustments*—how death affects one's everyday functions in the world, (b) *Internal adjustments*—how the death affects one's sense of self, (c) *Spiritual dimensions*—how death affects one's beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world (Worden, 2000). In the context of the culture of Botswana, the relatives of both the deceased and the widow take up roles to fill-in the gap that was created by deceased's departure, and thus temporarily relieving the widow of her day-to-day responsibilities. This is one of the community behaviors that meet the external adjustments' dimension and is clearly observable during the active mourning period.

During mourning, the society expects specific rituals to be undertaken by the widow—a change in her demeanor, and all the specific roles that she has to undertake (e.g., lying-in, staying indoors). There are roles specified for each community member, like making all the arrangements of the burial. All these behaviors satisfy the internal adjustments' dimension—the extent to which death affects the sense of self.

To meet the spiritual dimension, the cultural as well as religious rituals come into play. Additionally, experience shows that a significant number of widows are known to have become not only regular church goers, but staunch believers in the word of the Lord, following the loss of their husbands to death. Thus their spirituality and general outlook took a new perspective after this loss.

Task IV calls for emotionally relocating the deceased and moving on with life. This task requires the survivor to find a place for the deceased, but in a way that will not prelude her from going on with her life. Visiting the grave yard, the final cleansing ceremony, the destruction of all the mourning garments, and giving away the deceased's belongings, assist the widow to detach herself from the deceased. In relation to the cultural rituals and the community-orientedness of the society of Botswana, the widow undertakes all the tasks of mourning with tremendous support from her community. This support also helps the widow to begin to invest energy in other relationships within her community and gradually detaching herself from the deceased.

A significant number of scholars in death studies appreciate that the tasks of mourning presented by Worden (1982; 2002) are a modification of the Kubler-Ross model (1969). Kubler-Ross (1926-2004) can be described appropriately as the 'leading light' in death studies after Freud, who first wrote a book about *Mourning and Melancholia* in 1917. Several contemporary thanalogical writers have modified and applied the Kubler-Ross model to grieving individuals and groups. Kubler-Ross proposed that people who have been told that they will die from a terminal illness go through the following five stages: denial, bargaining, anger, sadness, and acceptance. The tasks of mourning postulated by Worden (1982; 2002) are a sequential process and an adaptation and modification of the Kubler-Ross model, even though addressing the actual death and not anticipatory grief as initially described by Kubler-Ross.

Although this stage model is now being questioned by some scholars in death studies, Kubler-Ross' theoretical approach to understanding death has provided profound insights into, *not* only understanding the phenomenon of death, but the process involved

in working through death, loss, grief, and bereavement. This study examined the experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to the performance of cultural rituals as they mourned their husband's death. The study sought also to find out those aspects of rituals which enhanced or hindered healing in widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was: how can knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

Cultural Responses to Death

The event of death is a dreaded, a devastating and an inevitable phenomenon, a dramatic and a mysterious end to all life processes (Kriger, 1957). Death has always been experienced by all nations of the world since time immemorial, and will continue to be experienced by human beings as long as mankind exists in the universe. Despite its long and ancient history, the event of death has never been experienced an easy task to undertake and complete by affected individuals and communities. The pain it brings to mankind is forever an excruciating one. In an effort to cope with the devastating effects of loss incurred through death, all nations of the world devised culture-specific responses to deal with this phenomenon in their midst. Of all the losses to death, the death of a husband, in the context of this piece of research, has generally been described as the most difficult. According to Collins and Collins (2005) the death of a spouse often means the loss of multiple interrelated types of support including social, emotional, and physical. Archer cited in Shaver and Tancredy (2001) states that grieving is especially intense following the death of a spouse, whose contributions are still needed for reproduction, child care, and child support. Brehm, Kassim, and Fein, (2002) confirm this statement

when they indicate that the death of a spouse was assigned a mean value of one hundred (100), on the Holmes and Rahe Life Stress Inventory. This numerical value, which rated the highest in this inventory, and insights highlighted by these writers, indicate the intensity of loss of a husband as experienced by the widow.

The organization of People Living With Cancer (PLWC, 2005) is one of the most up-to-date and trusted resource for cancer information on the internet; points out that the feelings of loss following the death of a loved one are universal, but the ways these feelings are experienced and expressed differ across cultures. The PWLC reiterates that each culture has its own rituals and practices that guide grief, and help dying individuals and their loved ones cope with the loss.

In the culture of Botswana, the approach to death is organized into a set of rituals and communal customs that structure the initial response to death, These ritual performances follow a set order, in which all acts follow one another sequentially; no act may erroneously be omitted, or precede the other in any haphazard way. In this way death rituals are carried out in the most sacred manner—probably due to fact that death is a sacred event.

Responses in Botswana and Southern Africa

In Botswana and most countries in southern Africa, the indigenous rituals are instituted instantaneously and simultaneously with the religious rituals. There is a very thin dividing line, if any, that separates the traditional from the religious responses to death. This statement is supported by Levers (2006) indicating that in her experience, working with many types of healers and numerous churches of the African Independent Movement, the boundaries between religion and traditional healing were relatively

blurred. This is attributed to the fact that, when the Christian religion was introduced and accepted by Batswana, they still held onto the corpus of their belief system and customary practices (Mbiti, 1989). These customary practices have always been their way of life and could not be erased from their minds overnight, if they can ever be erased at all.

Accordingly, in this discussion, the reader will realize that both the religious and cultural rituals play an equally significant part and are paid greater attention in the face of death. These rituals are intended to assist widows and the community at large to mourn their loss and to achieve healing eventually. Mbiti (1989) stresses that “in Africa, religion permeates all departments of life, so fully that it is not easy or possible to isolate it” (p. 1). It is hoped that findings that will emerge from this investigation can guide counselors in Botswana and Africa, to devise strategies of combining the traditional approach of providing care to grieving widows with the professional counseling intervention, to ensure a culturally relevant psychosocial approach to care.

Family Meaning-Making in Death

Family as a System

The family is addressed in this section as a system, because death of a family member affects all members as individuals or groups. The way in which a family constructs meaning from the death of a family member, will greatly determine how they will grieve. In the context of this investigation, which is examining the experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to the performance of cultural rituals; meaning is a cognitive representation of reality held in the minds of individual family members, but

constructed interactively with others in the family (Nadeau, 1998). Accordingly, when a family member dies the shock wave is felt throughout the family.

To diffuse this shock wave, family members either as individuals or as a system devise strategies not only to counter the shock, but to make meaning, and thus, be in a better position to deal with the loss of their loved one. These strategies include story-telling, using dreams, making comparisons, characterizing the deceased, “coincidancing” and using “family speak” (Nadeau, 1998, p. 336).

In terms of the Adlerian view, family members are social, purposeful, subjective, and interpretive in their interactions with one another (Coombs, 2005). Whilst members interact as a system, the subjective aspect of grief becomes evident in the manner in which each family member reacts in his or her own way towards the same loss in the family.

Adler accredited as the father of individual psychology and Adlerian family therapy, perceives individuals from a holistic and systematic context. He believes that, individuals cannot be understood out of their family and social context in which they live (Coombs, 2005). This leads to an understanding that as a system, family members interact purposefully within an interrelational context that influences each member’s perception, development, and worldview. Consequently, these behaviors in turn shape the family as a whole (Coombs).

Furthermore, regarding meaning making in death and difficult times, Frankl is accredited for outstanding work in his book, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1992), in which he described how people can withstand even the most horrible situations in their lives, when they can make meaning out of them. Frankl, a psychiatrist who survived three years

in Auschwitz and other Nazi concentration camps, emphasized that “the will to meaning” is the basic motivation for human life. Frankl’s mother, father, brother, and his wife, all died in concentration camps or were sent to gas ovens. Except for his sister, his entire family perished in these camps, and he still found reason to live.

Nietzsche who is fondly quoted by Frankl (1992) supports the “will to live” when he states that, “He who has a *why* to live for can bear almost any *how*” (p. 9). These powerful statements, challenge persons faced with great suffering to find meaning and purpose for existence in the world in order to forge ahead with their lives. Frankl describes pursuing the “will to live,” as a way of transcending suffering and finding significance in the act of living. Accordingly, if people would not make meaning in any seemingly *senseless* suffering that comes their way, they may not find reason to live. In this context, suffering is seen as adding meaning and value to life.

Moreover, Frankl motivates people in suffering by stating that their answers must consist not in talk and mediation, but in ‘right action and right conduct,’ because life means ultimately taking responsibility to find the right answers to its problems, and to fulfill those tasks which it constantly sets for each individual. Putting all together, Frankl says “to live is to suffer” (p. 9). In this way, Frankl motivates people as individuals and in groups to face up to life’s most senseless situations, by meaningfully defining them in order to transcend the pain, chaos, and confusion that death, specifically continues to bring upon human beings.

Constructivist Approach to Meaning-Making

By definition, constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world

we live in. Each of us generates our own “rules” and “mental models,” which we make sense of our experiences. In view of this definition, when individuals are faced with a significant loss, they adjust their mental models to accommodate the new loss (Klass, 1996).

According to Klass (1996) in the constructivist model, the purpose of grief is to construct durable biographies of the individual and social narratives of the dead person, and of the survivors. These narratives enable the living to integrate the dead into their lives. Klass describes narratives as stories that help people make sense of their lives by telling a story that makes sense of their past and present experiences. Consciously or unconsciously, people have an autobiography that they are constantly revising in the light of new experiences. Klass succinctly highlights that if something like an important death does not make sense, it is regarded as “nonsense.” Individuals and groups want to keep seeing the world the same way, but sometimes death forces one to see the world differently. According to Klass, they begin to construct new narratives, new biographies of themselves and of the deceased.

Functions of Cultural Rituals in Death

Rituals of divination are found across all African cultures, Asia, Europe, and many other cultures of the world. According to Pemberton (n. d.) in a website article, sharing the universal concern for human suffering, Africans have developed many such rituals to deal with a variety of difficult conditions; bodily affliction and dying, social conflict, the destructive forces of nature, an individual’s uncertainty, ignorance, and moral perplexity in making decisions that will affect his or her future or that of an entire community.

Africans are generally known to employ rituals of divination to discover the context of meaning for their lives, and sometimes to discern a personal destiny (Pemberton, n. d.). In the context of the culture of Botswana, cultural rituals are instantaneously instituted once death has been confirmed. This is a social norm and a community mandated behavior. It is a filial responsibility on the part of the widow; above all, rituals are intended to help the bereaved find answers to the cause of death (Nwoye, 2005), and thus construct biographies that will help them survive the loss.

Understanding the meanings that bereaved family members construe from encountering death of one of their members, yields important information that can build a useful theory and direct effective and culturally relevant psychosocial interventions for Botswana and many other nations of Africa.

We will now look at what rituals are, and the various roles they play in the day-to-day lives of people, particularly the bereaved. According to Rando (1984) “a ritual is a specific behavior or activity that gives symbolic expression to certain feelings and thoughts of actors, individually or as a group. It may be habitually repeated, or a one-time occurrence” (p. 104). As ceremonious acts, the power of rituals derives from the belief that the individual has to provide meaning into their lives (Davis, n. d.). Cohen (1967) says that rituals offer individuals a chance to reconnect with life, emphasizing that even the smallest of the ceremonies can give meaning to our daily lives, by allowing us to connect with one another, our own psyches, transitions, and passages of our lives.

Rituals can be described as universal to life regardless of ethnic, religious, or socioeconomic status of the family (Friesen, 1990). In view of this, families celebrate holidays or rites of passage which are framed by their religions, cultural or ethnic origins;

although, there might be variations in the number and quality in these ceremonies. As a family unit, rituals connect people to their previous generations; as such rituals commemorate our past, recognize and consider our future (Canine, 1996).

Ritual undertaking is a public event that draws people together (Wolfelt, n. d.). These symbolic acts have multiple functions in the family and in the culture (Grimes, 1982). According to Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, and Schut, (2000, p. 15), “grief does not occur in isolation but in interaction with others.” The primary purpose of rituals of death is to enhance healing for the bereaved family and community. ‘Family and community’ is mentioned time and again, because in the culture of Botswana death is a public affair and does affect the bereaved’s neighboring community and friends. There are other specific purposes for undertaking rituals in death, which are addressed in this piece of research. They are presented in the following section.

Healing

Friesen (1990) states that, one function of rituals is to facilitate healing; he says personal and relational healing is needed at various stages and this become a very important part of the healing process. Losses that are sustained through death require healing. Addressing the destruction of the World Trade Centre Towers in New York, and the bombing of the Pentagon in 2001, September 11, Wolfelt (n. d.) in a website article, wrote that in expression of grief, communities across the country felt the need to come together to light candles, to pray to sing and to remember, to grieve and to heal. Randall (2004) remarks that a community service affirms the reality of death which is recognized by many professionals as the first step in grieving. Davis (n. d.) echoes Randall when he

mentions that ritual draws together healing communities and opens space in which profound healing takes place.

Alexander (n. d.) in a website article also addresses the healing effects of ritual, indicating that good rituals have the ability to soothe the soul and balance the psyche. Furthermore, Alexander adds that rituals offer people a chance to express their emotions, to understand their feelings, and come to terms with their place in the universe. Canine (1996) exhorts that rituals bring us comfort and initiate the acceptance of the loss. In the context of Botswana, rituals of healing are reinforced by adding such tangibles as herb-treated dishes, drinking medicines and herbal baths. Culturally, people in Botswana and most of Africa believe in “doing something” to enhance healing rather than what I refer to as a mere *abstraction* of events.

Creation of a Community of Support

Whenever death strikes in a community, members gather together to support and mourn with the bereaved family. The community of support that is created by the event of death is historically known to enhance healing for the bereaved family. In Botswana and most countries in southern Africa, death is a public and a community event; as soon the news of death is known, every community member close-by is socially obliged to go and pay tribute to the bereaved family. In this way the more people attend the mourning ceremonies and pay tribute to deceased’s family, the more the bereaved feel that they were truly supported and cared for, hence draw comfort and solace from these actions displayed by their community. Such remarks are commonly heard following a burial in Botswana; “there were multitudes that attended this funeral, some of whom I did not even

know and others that I have not seen in many years, they came from far and wide to support us in our loss.”

By bringing people together, rituals create a community of support for the bereaved family. Thus, community gathering of community ensures ‘structure and order’ (van Gennep, 1960) which is critical in a funeral ceremony. Structure and order diffuse chaos and confusion that usually ensues following the announcement of death. One of the unwritten rules of community spirit in Botswana and most of Africa is showing up or gathering with other mourners at the bereaved family home, once news of death is known. If a community member is frequently absent from neighboring community funerals, he or she may not get community support at a time that the concerned member needs it the most. The community, in a collective spirit will give back to the individual, an “equal share” of what he or she gave to them in the past, in terms of support. This is the social order.

Kilonzo and Hogan (2006) bring to light the fact that, there is no member of the community who will be allowed to be indifferent to the presence of death in their immediate community. They further emphasize that there are clearly prescribed rules that exist as well as strict rituals in every tribe determining the appropriate behavior for everyone in the face of death. Therefore, if someone deviates from the norm, they violate a social order and will be sanctioned accordingly. The presence of mourners is critically important because it enhances healing by communicating to the bereaved that they are not alone. Jeffreys (2005) accurately described the healing potential drawn from the presence of the mourning community in the following excerpt;

A large part of healing comes *not* only from the communal aspect of rituals and prayer services. The ancient procedure of the tribe or clan gathering when one of them has died has its roots in showing visible proof that the community is still intact and will survive (community gathering is the one most visible and initial signs that mark the presence of death in Botswana). For many mourners, the presence of other people gives a sense of support and the knowledge that they are still part of a larger protective social group. There is an expectation by others that when they suffer loss, there will be similar community support....it is the presence of structured rituals and the presence of community in support that offers the healing potential of death related rituals (p. 14).

Hoang (2005) stresses also about community that is created by rituals of death when he highlights that, the elaborate details of death rituals require extensive and intensive involvement of the family social network and the whole community. These rituals communicate the social values of communal responsibility. Geertz (1973) emphasizes that traditional communal rituals are not only associated with symbols that express the core of life's values sacred to the culture and society, but that of all the rites of passage, they most vigorously reinforce community identity and strengthen its bonds.

Communication

As the bereaved perform various symbolic acts, simultaneously, they are communicating with one another their emotions and feelings, regarding the loss they have incurred. Davis (n. d.) accentuates that a ritual is a way of acknowledging our relationship to each other, and to spirit and earth. Furthermore, Davis elaborates that celebrating the life of the deceased, holding a night vigil of prayers, singing dirges, and

giving testimonies about the deceased, calls to our attention and communicates our relationship with each other. Lighting candles around the deceased's coffin, the graceful movements of mourners, the tone of voices during speeches, and the general demeanor of mourners communicate our intentions to act with integrity, openness, and helps us to interact with each other in a socially acceptable manner.

In addition to the behaviors of mourners mentioned above, in Botswana one significant way of communicating the presence of death in a community is by making a bon fire, a duty which is specifically for men. This fire can be seen by people from a long distance as it lights-up thorough the dark skies at night. Fire is a symbol used by Batswana to communicate "life and hope." While the bon fire is witnessed as a symbol of loss and not mere light or energy, it connotes that the bereaved will have support of their community, thus instilling hope in adversity. According to Davis (n. d.) communication then deepens into communion.

Canine (1996) highlights that rituals help survivors to have a healthy interaction with the deceased. He enlightens us that it is impossible to participate in a ritual without reminiscing about the dead person, especially if the act focuses on something associated with the deceased. Most of us can recall instances when the deceased family member might have asked others to pray for him if he died; so that a specific ritual might entail special prayers for the deceased. Accordingly, doing "what my beloved wanted," the bereaved relatives ensure a healthy interaction with the deceased, as well as communicating this attitude among themselves. Such healthy interactions are believed to promote healing.

Full Acceptance of the Loss

Canine (1996) an expert in grief studies, underscores that engaging in a ritual can only take place when the bereaved believe that the death has occurred, and when they begin to accept loss, otherwise ritual does not occur. (We need to be cognizant of pathological denial which does not fit this stance). Therefore, the existence of ritual is a sign of a healthy grief response. A widowed friend of mine shared with me how ritual helped her come to reality with the loss of her husband. She related that when people began trickling into the compound, she was hopeful that one of them will come up to her and say “it was a mistake...he did not really die.” However, once the elders asked her to come with them to *palila*—when she lifted the hoe, which culturally is held the other way round or upside down), and hit the ground, something struck her hard that “it had truly happened...he has died.”

Additionally, Canine (1996) emphasizes that as a rehearsal of the whole process, every ritual is a miniature grief process which channels grief into a meaningful activity with a beginning and an end. In the culture of Botswana there are various miniature rituals which help the widow accept the loss, one of them being to *palila*, as described above. Oftentimes, widows spoke of “nothing else to do,” when describing their experience of the burial; depicting acceptance or withdrawing energy from the deceased. Experience teaches us that in some cultures, the closest of kin do not get to see the final moments of the burial, this leaves one wondering how the concerned people achieve closure. However, it is always critical to remember that grief response is a constructed culturally.

Sanctioning the Bereaved as the Chief Mourner

To have someone identified as the chief mourner in a funeral, naturally brings about order and structure, and sets direction that the funeral events will follow. The performance of rituals of death allow for the sanctioning of the *most bereaved* as the chief mourner--case the widow. There are specific rituals that can only be undertaken by the chief mourner, further defining her role in the funeral ceremony. Rituals help also to define the various roles within the family (PLWC, 2005). In addition, a period of mourning is formally delineated specifically for the widow and the closest of kin. The duration of the widow's mourning period is determined by the relationship with the deceased and the age of the widow (Cohen, 1967). Depending on the relationship the couple had with each other, the mourning period may be longer or shorter. Sometimes, elders just perform cultural rituals to "protect" the surviving widow from the dangerous forces of the "invisible world" believed to be associated with death, even when the relationship between the spouses was not necessarily healthy.

Defined as the most bereaved, the widow and family are also viewed as a source of pollution. Consequently, they are physically segregated from the rest of the society until they are purified (Cohen, 1967). Specifically, the widow in Botswana is expected to avoid places like the cattle -watering ponds and large public gatherings (and many other taboos not included here), until she had undergone preliminary cleansing. Moreover, the widow must deny herself pleasures like ornamentation, and general amusement during the formalized mourning period. The usual day-to-day activities are curtailed also, until all traditional obligations have been fulfilled. According to Middleton (1966) rituals of purification are required before the widow can resume normal social relations.

Traditionally, in the Batswana culture, following the death of her husband, the widow immediately effects change in costume; she is always covered in a blanket or a shoulder scarf during the active mourning period regardless of the weather. She is unveiled only after burial, but is supposed to maintain a calm disposition throughout the mourning period. All these behaviors define the widow as the chief mourner. The final cleansing ceremony therefore, frees the widow from being a participant in death (Cohen, 1967).

Gluckman (1966) emphasizing the social attributes of a ritual and the importance of supernatural sanction states; “Within this context, ritualization refers to the performance of a prescribed action with the expectation that the behavior will ‘express and amend social relationships’ and help to secure mystical blessing and purification, protection and prosperity” (p. 24). Consequent to sanctioning is the power of ritual to assist the widow to publicly acknowledge the depth of her loss. The symbolic way of wearing dark colors, which may be green, navy blue, or black for a designated period is one example of openly acknowledging loss in the culture of Batswana. There are specific roles that are undertaken by the widow only, defining her as the chief mourner. No other woman can *dare* to play these roles.

Rituals Assist the Bereaved to Express Themselves

Rituals are symbolic in nature, and help the bereaved to express their thoughts and feelings. Cohen (1967) declares that once death is known, family, friends, and neighbors draw together and express their grief; by wailing, weeping, screaming, and singing dirges. In addition, during the night vigil, mourners join in with the bereaved family to sit, throughout the night in the presence of the deceased’s body. Words are inadequate,

but the symbolic gathering and activities that are undertaken by family members and friends and relatives, help everyone express their thoughts and feelings (Jeffreys, 2005). Wolfelt (n. d.) accurately describes the power inherent in these symbols acts, saying that they provide us with means to express our beliefs and feelings when words alone will not do these beliefs and feelings justice. On the same vein, as the bereaved enact these meaning-filled behaviors, they simultaneously draw support from the mourning community. Scheff (1979) says that one function of rituals is their provision of support during periods of mourning, particularly funerals. The element of support drawn from the community is well presented by Friesen (1990) in this excerpt:

During mourning, groups of people join with each other to bear each other's burdens, share food, wear certain clothes, and express certain words of comfort. The experience of mourning is time-limited and the circumstances are well defined, thus creating a feeling of safety and security for participants. Mourning rituals are often linked to meals or visiting, consequently they may reduce isolation and loneliness, especially during periods of loss and in death (p. 43).

As mourners gather at the bereaved family home, they partake in all other activities that contribute to preparations for the final departure of the deceased—the burial. A community of mourners sends flowers for the funeral and contributes to a funeral fund; all these actions demonstrate support, care and concern for the bereaved (Canine 1996). In the culture of Botswana, one specific feature that depicts a supportive and caring attitude that is easily identifiable is the special care tendered to the widow. The widow is assigned a caregiver who ensures that she get meals, she takes care of her hygiene needs and specifically provides an anchor for the widow as she takes short walks

around her home. Most importantly, the care-giver relays all communication, messages of condolences, and even dampening some messages that she may deem unpalatable for the widow. Some members of the mourning community also are charged with care of younger children; this helps the newly widowed mother to have only the loss to focus on. All these behaviors are ways in which the community expresses a caring and supportive attitude towards the bereaved.

According to Wolfelt (n. d.) in a website article, through ritual the bereaved receive on-going support from others. He points out that funerals are public venues for offering support to others and being supported in grief. Wolfelt reiterates that, people who attend the funeral do this not for their own benefit, but primarily for the benefit of the bereaved. Additionally, Wolfelt (n. d.) expounds that funerals make a social statement that says “COME, SUPPORT ME.”

Davis (n. d.) in a website article mentions that ritual provides sanctuary. In this sense sanctuary refers to both a safe place, protected enough for one to go into emotions and to a place of worship; where the deeper meaning of grief, rage, and despair is acknowledged. In this sanctuary, those who were reluctant to share their feelings and insights begin to speak up, and risks become less risky in this space.

Rituals Help Grievers Make Meaning from the Loss

One of the major functions of rituals in loss from death is to assist the bereaved family make meaning. In a majority of cases, when someone we love dies, we naturally begin to question the meaning of life—and death (Klass, 1996). To accomplish the journey to healing, most writers of death studies affirm that the bereaved need to explore a number of questions that can help them find reason to continue living (e.g. Klass, 1996;

Wolfelt, 1996). Still, these experts in death studies draw attention to the fact that there may be no definite answers; nonetheless, it is important to have the opportunity to think and feel through the loss.

Randall (2004) stresses that, through the death rituals the bereaved have the opportunity to validate the life of the person that died; by affirming that this life was important and this person is now being missed. Klass (1996) states that indigenous cultural rituals also help individuals find meaning attached to life. He expresses that when a significant person dies, the issue of meaning is central for survivors; they ask themselves the meaning of death itself; and what the dead person meant to them, and the community. The task of meaning-making is done in the interchange between the individual and their culture. Klass emphasizes that individuals seek to make sense of their experience using cognitive or mental models that are supplied by their culture.

Meaning-making in the face of loss is addressed also by Miller and Harvey (2000) when they described *how* the majority of people live “unwittingly” as if they believe they have a million years, whereas survivors do not. Moreover, Miller and Harvey, highlight that survivors are forced to confront the fragility of life, and acknowledge their own vulnerability, and live with an awareness of mortality and the real constraints imposed by death.... “And yet it is in this very awareness of the ever-present possibility of loss that reveals what it is to be alive. Once the reality of death intrudes, life can no longer be taken for granted. Not surprisingly then, survivors commonly report a newfound appreciation for life itself” (p. 34).

In view of this, all the attitudes, actions, and behaviors that are displayed by survivors, are intended to honor the deceased family member, and to appreciate the value

of life. Each and every culture in the world has specific death, loss, grief, and bereavement rituals (PLWC, 2005). As mentioned earlier, however varied in nature and across different cultures; rituals are intended for the bereaved to make sense of the loss they have incurred, to achieve healing and to continue with life in the absence of the deceased (Worden, 2002).

It is critical for counselors in Botswana to understand the different meanings that survivors (widows in the context of investigation) construe from their losses, in this way they can intervene in ways that are meaningful to clients. Accordingly, they can be able attend to those aspects in the client's life that are most significant to them. Counselors need to be consciously aware also that interchange between individuals and culture, grief, and resolution of grief, happens in a series of nested cultural narratives—family, clan, tribe, community, sub-cultural, nation, religious tradition and so on (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner enlightens that at each level of those narratives; supply the plots for the construction of individual narratives that endow grief with meaning and manageability. Hence, counselors can begin to understand clients and their concerns better if they consider the information exchange between the individual, and their immediate as well as distal environment.

Rituals Create Structure and Order

The PWLC (2005) states that death can cause chaos and confusion and rituals can provide a sense of predictability and normalcy for both the bereaved and the wider community. The PWLC is an organization that supports people affected by cancer and those dying from cancer. This organization also provides invaluable information regarding the structure and order created by rituals at the time of death. This organization

also emphasizes that rituals and customs provide a set of directions that help structure the time surrounding death, and prescribe roles for different individuals. Additionally, the PWLC highlights that rituals and customs of death further create structure and order by addressing questions such as these: (a) how the body should be handled after death including how the body should be cleansed and dressed? (b) Who should handle the body, and whether the body should be cremated or buried (cremation is an unknown idea in Botswana)? (c) Should grief be expressed quietly and privately, or loudly and publicly, such as with public crying, keening or wailing? (d) What ceremonies and rituals should be performed and who should participate—such as children, community members, and friends (it is only recently that children in Botswana have been allowed opportunity to observe burial of their parents)? (e) Are there grief expectations for men versus women, or for children versus adults? (f) How should the deceased be remembered over the lifetime of the family, such as through ongoing rituals to celebrate or communicate with the deceased? (h) What new roles are bereaved family members expected to take on, such as whether the widow is expected to remarry or not; and whether the eldest son is expected to become the family leader?

Naturally, there would be unimaginable chaos and confusion, if questions such as these mentioned in the section above were not addressed in the event of death. Particular reference is to the critical moments following the announcement of death, which are fraught with shock and confusion. In all nations the world over, the bereaved family and the surrounding community in one way or another, work to address these pertinent questions posed by the PLWC (2005), in order to pave a clear direction for the entire funeral ceremony and to help the assist the bereaved to achieve healing.

Hoang (2005) when presenting a chronological order of rituals of death in Vietnamese society highlights that the socially prescribed rituals, from the time of death until the end of the mourning period, are designed to provide structure for the grief process. Likewise, in the community of Botswana immediately following the news of death, every community member assumes some role in the funeral ceremony. The widow assumes the lying-in role in respect for her fallen husband. Relatives, friends, and the neighboring help with arrangements for the burial. These include keeping the widow company, a task done by widowed and elderly women, fetching water and firewood, and preparing refreshments for mourners and many other duties that are undertaken in a funeral which are prescribed according to age or gender.

There is sudden and detectable change in demeanor displayed by the neighboring community, and those that make visitations to the bereaved family home. The manner of dress changes, the manner of walking as well as communication depicts sorrow. Gender and age differences become particularly vivid as mourners occupy their places in the death home; men stay away from women, younger people aggregating away from the adults, and the elderly population. Elders initiate the performance of the relevant and due death rituals. In this way, rituals spell out the roles and responsibilities for each community member. Thus, sets direction for the funeral ceremony by bringing under control the chaos and confusion that would have ensued.

One prominent author, who addressed the aspect of order and structure fashioned through rituals, is Krige (1957). Krige described death as the last drama of life which robs the community of a valuable member, by creating profound emotions and striking at the very foundations of society; threatening its cohesion and solidarity. Krige goes onto

to remind us that, this demoralization is counteracted by the death and mourning ceremonies which provide a means of re-integration to this shaken society. She emphasizes further that mourning customs and practices are the means by which the social sentiments of survivors are slowly re-organized and adapted to the new conditions of death. “Death disrupts the social structure, especially small networks, thus mourning rites focus on rehabilitating the damaged role system by specifically re-allocating roles” (Krige 1957, p. 159).

Beyond all the functions of rituals which have been discussed above, in the culture of Botswana, rituals are undertaken primarily for two significant reasons: ancestor veneration, and cleansing or purification of the bereaved family which is believed to be polluted by the “spirit of death” and thus, can contaminate the community

Ancestor Veneration

To appreciate the significance of cultural mourning rituals in the lives of Botswana, it is most important to understand the belief system of most Africans concerning death and the living dead—the ancestors. This could be described as an African religion which has always guided the way of life of this people and their response to death of a family member. This belief system was able to withstand the pressures and influences from the Western civilization, education, technological advancement, and science. As a consequence of this belief system, there is veneration and continuous communication between the living and the dead (Yangaza, 1983). Dreams are some of the means through which communication with the deceased is achieved. Sometimes, communication comes as prophetic messages from the clan’s mediums integrating the deeper reality of the past, present, and future (Lienhardt, 1961).

According to Kilonzo and Hogan (1999) the living-dead retain their physical form becoming “humanized supernatural, almost deified, omnipotent, and indestructible” (p. 261). The living-dead continue to live within the terrestrial sphere (Mbano & Komba, 1983). According to Stroebe et al., (2001) “the dead play a role in moral lives of the living” (p. 17). Their (living-dead) function is mediation (Yangaza, 1983) but they may induce punishment in the form of mysterious illnesses if taboos and family ceremonies are not observed by surviving relatives. In Botswana as is with most peoples of Africa, people continue to pay exorbitant funeral costs to ensure proper attention to funeral rituals in an effort to appease ancestors.

In view of the above statement, Hoang (2005) asserts that death is viewed as not an end, but *only* a final stage of life to be transformed into another—to become an ancestor. Accordingly, funeral rituals in Botswana are undertaken immaculately to pave a safe passage for the deceased and for ancestor appeasement-of which the deceased is on his way to become one of them. The following excerpt depicts the need and the significance of ancestor veneration through the utility of cultural rituals:

The soul, like the body is undergoing transition. The corporeal remains with the body until the final burial, “while the marrow of the soul,” the essence wanders incessantly, unable to enter the homeland of the dead until the completion of all the ritual duties by the survivors. The soul lives marginally in two worlds....it belongs neither to the afterworld, nor can it resume its existence on earth. In this condition, it may revenge against its kin, especially if they fail to fulfill their ritual obligations. Treated as intruders in both worlds and destined to wander

indefinitely, the living (relatives) ensure a favorable outcome for the deceased by meeting their responsibilities (Hertz, 1960, p. 38).

Principally, for this reason, rituals are mandated activities following the death of a significant family member within the culture of Botswana, and have to be undertaken in the most flawless traditional protocol to prevent the wrath of the ancestors, and also to ensure protection to the surviving relatives. In their article regarding the war-affected children of Angola, Green and Honwana (1999) elaborated on the crucial need for *not* only cleansing the child-soldiers, but to conduct proper burial for the people that these child-soldiers had killed. He emphatically stated:

The impossibility of performing proper burials in time of war does not allow these spirits to be placed in proper positions in the world of ancestors, so they are considered bitter and potentially harmful to their killers and passers-by (p. 2).

Cleansing

In the framework of the Botswana culture, after the scheduled mourning period is over, the bereaved family members undergo cleansing or purification within the prescribed period. If this is not done according, they begin to live under “watchful eyes of discontent” ancestors. As a result, they become vulnerable to mysterious illnesses and other dangerous incidents within the environments, which may be witnessed as horrible accidents and many other causes of death or general family disharmony. Hertz (1960) has been instrumental in explicating this part of the African culture when he highlights in this way:

The mourners-like the body and soul, are in a precarious state. Ritually charged and dangerous, they no longer can live as others do. They do not dress or adorn

themselves, or eat the same food as their neighbors. They may not leave the village. The mourners are shunned, not only by man but also by spirits. They are forsaken not only by man, but also by spirits. As long as their impurity lasts, they cannot hope for any help from the powers above (p. 34).

Beyond the realm of the ancestors, cleansing is a social obligation in Botswana, intended to rid the widow of what is commonly referred to as *senyama*. A strongly held belief in Botswana is that if the widow is not cleansed of *senyama*, she can pollute community possibly causing monstrous ailments. The cleansing ceremony is a collective event which is attended by friends and relatives, who do so to have full proof that the widow has been “traditionally” cleansed of death pollutants which may contaminate the community. According to Hertz (1960) the final ceremony completes the separation of the dead from the living, and ensures the deceased’s soul entry into the community of the sacred ancestors. Furthermore, the purification ceremony frees the living from their mourning obligations; they resume normal day-to-day activities and resume also their previously interrupted social relations. Additionally, Hertz, emphasizes; “the cleansing celebration marks an end to a perilous time....the dark period dominated by death is over, a new era begins” (p. 56). Most widows that I have worked have indicated that they experienced a feeling of being “liberated” and that of security once they were cleansed. They also shared that, they were confident that they could not be afflicted by any dangerous spirits or lethal ailments associated with death.

These findings from the literature on death studies regarding the role played by rituals of death cited above guided the focus of this investigation. This study examined the lived experiences of widows in Botswana regarding the performance of cultural

rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourned their husbands' deaths. Moreover, the study sought to portray how knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation can begin to inform culturally sensitive and appropriate psychosocial interventions.

Stages of Mourning

The Tripartite Stage Process of Death Rituals

The stages of mourning were guided by the tripartite stage process which was first coined by van Gennep in 1909 in his book, "Les Rites de Passage." When translated to English it becomes "The rites of Passage." According to (Pecorino, 2002) it could better be translated as "The rite of Transition," since van Gennep's (1960) study focused on ceremonies that individuals observed as they moved between life stages.

Turner (1969) elaborated on van Gennep's (1960) thesis suggesting that all ceremonies involving transition from one stage to another share a tripartite stage process—separation, transition, and incorporation or re-aggregation. These schemas of the "Rites de Passage" while they characterize all rites of passage, according to van Gennep they are not equally emphasized in all ceremonies by all cultural groups.

In this investigation examining the experiences of widows in Botswana, regarding the performance of cultural rituals of death; there are set funeral stages that are observed by this people, and have been classified under van Gennep's (1960) tripartite stage process. These stage processes are not observed with the same intensity throughout the funeral ceremony; intensity in each stage is dictated by the phase of the ceremony. For example, the separation stage which involves the actual burial of the deceased is much more intense than the transition and incorporation stages. If intensity could be measured

in terms of numbers of people who attend these ceremonies, naturally, the count will be higher during the separation stage—the burial, than there will be during incorporation, or the purification ceremony. Hence, the burial ceremony can be described as more intense than other stages in the funeral process (van Gennep, 1960).

Within the culture of Batswana, the period and the ritual process for completing the mourning process vary among the many ethnic groups in the country. However, there is a generic mourning procedure which is about 7-14 days long, followed by a scheduled mourning period for the widow and her family. This scheduled mourning period is usually 3-12 months depending on the age of the widow; the younger the widow the shorter the mourning period.

What follows is the description of the tripartite stage process and its relevance to the mourning processes in the culture of Botswana during an event of death. According to Kilonzo and Hogan (1999) within the traditional death rituals, this passage is not clear cut and by no means automatic. It involves an oppositional disengagement/engagement (Arbuckle, 1991). During this dynamic process, there is formal disengagement of the deceased from the living being ritually liberated to engage with his group—the living-dead. Through ritual ceremonies, survivors are simultaneously disengaging from the deceased (Kilonzo & Hogan). There is a large amount of energy that is expended by the bereaved during this dynamic oppositional process, which is evident in the intensity of pain that the bereaved subsequently suffer in an effort to disengage (Bowlby, 1979).

Separation

Separation, in the context of this inquiry is described as relinquishing previous social status, which is a requisite for a movement into a new social position in the social

structure (Pecorino, 2002). Accordingly, as the widow begins to mourn the death of her husband, she is involved in a process of detaching from the role of being a wife to assume a status of widowhood. Pecorino, explicates that symbolic separation is the depositing of the deceased's body into the grave. In Botswana, the widow is garbed in dark colored mourning clothes to mark the separation phase. There are several other processes that are observed by the widow as she moves between the different mourning stages; they will be discussed in detail in the next section of this study as "the chronological stages observed by the Bakalanga of Botswana." (There are *Bakalanga* also in other parts of Botswana and in Zimbabwe, who have not been included in this investigation).

Transition (luminality)

During this stage the widow enters into what anthropologists describe as the luminal period (lumen is a Latin word for threshold). Turner (1969) describes this period as sacred and dangerous; normal and ordinary activities are interrupted because the person is in a temporary undefined status in society. According to van Gennep (1960) the individual (widow) is "betwixt and between" two worlds; the world of the past and the future, between being a (former wife) and a new social destiny—a widow. Thus, in lumen the widow undergoes transformation which is perceived as shedding an old social identity while molding a new social personality (van Gennep). Furthermore, Pecorino elucidates that mourning is transition.

Whilst in mourning, the widow in Botswana is socially segregated from her community; her social life is suspended, and daily activities curtailed for the prescribed mourning period. Pecorino (2002) says their activities are hemmed in taboos. Additionally, during this phase the widow is expected to be dressed always in the dark

colored mourning clothes, and specifically, not to adorn herself in any ornaments, and to desist from the use of any skin conditioners and toners.

Goffman (1999) describes luminality as “leveling and stripping away” of structured statuses and roles, and individual status is deliberately played down, and what is common among participants is emphasized. According to Turner (1974), part of the aim of stripping away the familiar status symbols is the potential to produce, “the highest pitch of self-consciousness (p. 261).” In Kilonzo and Hogan’s words (1999); in a sense, ritual forces the mourners to get in touch with a deeper reality through a tangible connection with a transcendental God or Spirits. This is evident in the religious activities which play a major role during the night vigil within the framework of Batswana culture.

Re-aggregation

The third and final stage of the tripartite process is incorporation, which can be described as the recovery or re-aggregation phase. During this phase, social boundaries that were imposed on the widow are ritually diffused. Incorporation occurs when the mourners have fulfilled their ritual duties and have been cleansed in the traditional fashion (Krige, 1957; Turner, 1967; van Gennep, 1960).

The most significant activities during this aggregation stage in Botswana, is giving the widow a purifying bath, removal of mourning clothes into a new set of clothes. The symbolic “opening” and “lighting” of the house, and dispensing the deceased’s belongings also take place during the re-aggregation stage. At this stage, the widow is freed to join mainstream society and to resume her social life. All the mourning taboos are lifted and the scheduled mourning period is declared, over.

The primary purpose of this investigation was to find out how widows in Botswana experienced the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourned the deaths of their husbands. Furthermore, the study sought to find out what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was: how can knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation, begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

In the next section, I have discussed the chronologic stages of the rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement in Botswana, with reference to the *Bakalanga* ethnic group. van Gennep's (1960)'s tripartite stage process guided this description. The *Bakalanga* are an ethnic group that I have observed to possess a very rich culture in the face of death. It is my assumption that this ethnic group was able to resist the influence of missionaries, and was able to keep and maintain some major cultural practices evident in their general lives and particularly during the funeral of a significant family member.

The Chronologic Stages of Death Rituals

A Representation of the Society of Botswana

Botswana is a multi-ethnic society comprising of 25 languages, with most people speaking one ethnic language—*Setswana* (Booi, 2006; Chilisa 2005; Parsons, 1986). The *Bakalanga* speak *Ikalanga*, a language that is completely different from languages spoken by the rest of the ethnic groups in the country. Naturally, their way of responding to death is significantly different from all the other ethnic groups in the country, except the Ndebele, with whom they have a lot of similarities. Most ethnic groups within the country only differ in the dialect; otherwise the fundamental language is Setswana. I

selected this ethnic group because of familiarity with which I have, concerning their way of life. I was raised among the Bakalanga people in Mosojane village in the North East district of Botswana. The *Bakalanga* also display a lifestyle that is very similar to my own ethnic tribe—the *Ndebele*. The *Ndebele* are a tribe originating from Zimbabwe, but a political minority in Botswana. They initially and conveniently settled along the Botswana-Zimbabwe borders when they fled from the red ants, between 1836- 37, from what became the towns of Potchefstroom and Zeerust--in South Africa (Parsons, 1986).

Therefore, due to variations within ethnic groups in Botswana, it may not be possible to describe a generic mourning procedure that would entirely capture this complexity and diversity; therefore, the Bakalanga group was selected to represent the society of Botswana, for the purposes of this study.

The discussion of the chronologic stages of loss and grief depict the tripartite stage process involved in rituals of death. The chronologic stage processes described below were drawn from my experience and observation through socialization during my developmental years in the North East and some areas of the Central district. These districts house a significant number of the *Bakalanga* communities and for this reason; they are often referred to as ‘*Bakalanga* area.’

At the News of Death

The death of a household head is one of the highly respected of all losses to death in the society of Botswana. For the purposes of this study, the head of the homestead is defined as the husband. The funeral rites of an elderly person in the culture of Botswana must follow a prescribed cultural form and convey relevant respect. Rites befitting the person’s status must be performed, even if it means the deceased’s family must go into

debt to pay for them. Above all, these cultural rites are performed in such a way that both the deceased and the ancestors are pleased, failing which they can induce severe punishment upon survivors.

In the *Bakalanga* community, as soon as the husband is pronounced dead, The wife—*now* a widow, immediately withdraws from the “public eye” to occupy some private place in the house until some elders identify a *lying-in* place for her. In a village setting where there is no telephone communication system, the bereaved widow or whoever gets the news of death first, wails the loudest; the wail is immediately picked up by neighbors—women, who immediately respond with an inquiring wail—‘*what happened*, and simultaneously going to the eventful home. Instantaneously, the whole compound is filled with renewed wailing from women, both young and old. This wailing continues until the whole neighboring community has responded to the death wail. The advent of the telephone system in major towns and villages in Botswana has dismantled this cultural way of communicating the presence of death. However in the remotest of villages where development is slow, the ritual of wailing is still sustained as the only way of communicating the event of death; as ululation communicates an event of jubilation.

As a societal norm and obligation, elderly women soon “quiet” down from wailing, and begin to offer support to the widow and her children; thus calming down the chaos and confusion that would have ensued following the news of death. The women, who take control of the situation, are those previously widowed, thus they offer help and support drawing from their experience. These elders calm down the widow, by gently sharing their experiences with the new widow, difficulties, and the pain of losing a husband to death. They also stress to her that “this is what it means to be woman or

wife.” Then, they go on to “*hush my child.*” In the culture of Botswana, being a “woman” or a “wife,” means being able to withstand suffering of any kind. However, this does not mean that the widow cannot express her pain; the elders say these words to indicate their understanding of the widow’s loss. Nonetheless, she is expected to be strong for herself and her children.

The ritual of wailing is the initial response to death of the husband, a moment described by Kilonzo and Hogan (1999) “as charging the atmosphere, heightening the experience of grief, and creating a situation of meaningful chaos” (p. 265). This is indeed the most critical moment in the life of the widow—which I term ‘the beginning of the end’. It may be important to shed some light by stressing that, depending on the length of sickness and diagnosis at death, the bereaved may be strongly beseeched *not* to weep by posing a rhetoric such as: ‘*why do you cry*’-which would imply, ‘*you know what your husband died from.*’ Such a rhetorical question is presented in strongest tones especially, if it was the person died from a stigma-laden disease, like AIDS. At other times such remarks will be heard; “*you have had time to realize that this was how it would come to end*”. The meaning behind all these comments is to say that however painful it may be, she needs to be strong and work towards accepting the loss.

Chaos and Confusion

At this moment, there will be immerse confusion, shock and chaos among the family members, since the news of death is still fresh and unbelievable to them. The elderly women continue to work towards diffusing the shock and confusion. These are some of the commonly said, but most comforting words heard from the elders; “Hush my children, we share the pain with you all; or; this is shocking and painful to all of us but

even much harder for you, we understand. This is the time that the Lord has paid a special visit to your house; the Lord is visiting with this family right now. ” This is the culturally accepted way of supporting and comforting the widow and her family.

Most significantly, elders ask the bereaved family members to sit down next the widow who is now lying down, for a short but powerful prayer service. The prayer service together with the singing of mourning dirges does help in containing the chaos and confusion, thus calming down the situation. A much more intense prayer meeting is conducted by a minister of religion once available.

Male Response

Men also respond to the ritual of wailing by going quietly towards the death compound—men do not cry or wail in the culture of Botswana. In a flash, the widow is relieved of all her daily duties forthwith; and assumes *go ribama* (lying-in). *Lying-in* refers to the widow’s lying down continuously in the prone position, and she can only change this position as advised by elders. A commonly held belief is that, this position will help soften the burial ground. By lying on her abdomen, the “woman- a mother” (widow) requests “Mother Earth” to be kind to the men who will dig the grave. (In Botswana, men manually dig graves, in the early morning hours of the day of burial).

Lying-in is, on the part of the widow a show of respect to her fallen husband, a filial duty, and a social obligation. Most importantly is that men particularly, and the general public, should not find the newly widowed anywhere around her compound-it is culturally unacceptable. This is due to the strongly held belief that there is some blackness of death (*senyama*), or defilement (*boswagadi*,) in a family that has encountered death of one of its head-the husband, and may subsequently pollute the

community. Krige (1957) an anthropologist who worked South Africa in the late 1950s, highlights that “death defiles the whole kraal; and everybody is believed to be weak and to stand in some danger of being drawn after the deceased; hence various medications have to be taken throughout the mourning period” (p. 157). Accordingly, the widow and her family are provided with some protective herbs to take orally or to bath with, as preliminary cleansing and a protective measure.

The Widow as a Patient

As soon as the death of a husband is announced, the widow is now not only referred to as a *molwetsi* (sick one/patient), but *is* treated as *the sick one*. A previously widowed elder, is nominated from the widow’s family, or from among the relatives of her deceased husband’s clan, to render care and tend to all the widow’s needs as well as being her primary support. The kind of support alluded to here is not only emotional but physical. The widow is actually supported physically as she visits the bathroom or whenever she needs to run some quick, but short errand. ‘Quick’ and ‘short’ is stressed because the widow is not supposed to leave her room at all except for basic needs, such as relieving herself or taking a bath or for a much more serious issues that need her to leave the house.

The physical support is provided because; the widow is believed to have a *heavy heart* and *weak knees* and as such does not have much physical strength to sustain herself. It is particularly for this reason she is treated as the *sick one*. Jeffreys (2005) supports the notion of sickness following loss, when he states that, grieving people complain of various physical symptoms, some of which are: lack of energy, shortness of breath, dizziness, a perception of empty space within the body, and multiple pains.

A widowed friend of mine in her early days of mourning her husband's death once said to me; "I had never understood why elderly women physically supported the widow when she was taking walks around the house, following her husband's death. I always said to myself that, whenever my husband died, I will do everything on my own. I remember the day my husband died, I wanted to visit the bathroom; I stood up and before I knew it, everything became dark before my eyes and I fell to the ground." The experience of widows in Botswana regarding this special treatment, and the suddenly diminished physical strength is known as oral literature, but there are no documented records to confirm this experience.

Community Mobilization

Conversely, as the widow is immobilized the community members are energized into greater action as they assemble at the bereaved family's home. There is visible and pronounced age and gender differences as mourners undertake roles in arranging for the burial. These roles are gender and age oriented, and include but are not limited to fetching water, gathering firewood, getting refreshments ready and serving them to the mourners.

Accordingly, most of these pre-burial preparations are undertaken by younger men and women, under the leadership of an elder. Heavy lifting is done by the young and stronger men; such duties include slaughtering a beast for feasting before and after the burial and gathering logs for bon fire. The bon fire once set alight is never allowed to go off at any time during the active mourning period. This fire communicates the presence of death, and symbolizes hope and life for the family and community. Hence, there is a popular metaphoric in Botswana, that supports this behavior; *mosalagae, molelo o se time*

(when translated to English it means—the one who remains at home, keeps the fire burning). This means that even if the husband has died, other people will continue to support the bereaved family.

Words of Comfort and Strength

A short prayer service is conducted by a religious minister, or any church elder available to comfort and instill hope to the bereaved family. Sometimes this prayer meeting helps to bring down the chaos and confusion that would have ensued following the announcement of death. These prayer meetings continue to be held subsequently each morning and evening until a day before the burial. The day preceding the burial is colored by a more intense prayer service—the night vigil. The most commonly read biblical verse is drawn from the First book of Thessalonians Chapter 4, verse 13, which reads; “we do not want you be unaware, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope” (The New American Bible, 1970). These prayer meetings are known to have brought some comfort and hope to the bereaved family and actually to diffuse the shock in the minds of the bereaved (Jeffreys, 2005).

Setting the Tone for the Burial

All these activities discussed above, mark and acknowledge the raw presence of death and attest to its reality. Rituals are then instituted to structure and give direction to the funeral process delineating roles and responsibilities for all community members in their different capacities. The mourners are “in between and betwixt”—there is not much movement forward; people are in some kind of “waiting mode”—for the burial. Even though the mourners are actively involved in making arrangements for the burial,

psychologically, they are “waiting” for the burial. This is the period that van Gennep (1960) described as liminality or transition.

Any other announcements concerning the progress towards burial and other pertinent messages are presented during these prayer meetings. Anyone who wants to keep themselves abreast with the processes for the burial stands a better chance if they attend prayer meetings.

Deceased's Body Comes Home—the Day before Burial

In the late afternoon hours of the day before the burial, some family members, close relatives, and some community members go to fetch the deceased's body from the mortuary. The widow is consulted, but not involved in this part of the ritual process. However, she is taken away by her mother in law and some elderly women to go and *palila*. This is the role only for the chief mourner. The widow then comes back to lie down more intensely until the men come back with word that the digging of the grave has been successfully completed. Additionally, during this time the widow does not eat any food or drink any water, still based on the belief that this behavior will help the softening for the ground for digging.

Once in the homestead, the body of the deceased is positioned next to the widow's floor bed. The widow and her deceased husband spend the whole night in this close proximity, to mark the last meeting before the final departure—the burial. This is one of the most dramatic and emotion-laden moments for the widow and her family, a moment of heightened mourning evidenced by keening, wailing by the widow and her children. The most mournful dirges are heard from the older population, who usually do not have as much energy to wail as the younger family members.

According to Wolfelt (n. d.) in a website article, meaningful funeral ceremonies can serve as wonderful points of departure for the head “understanding of the death” .Within the framework of the tripartite stage process also, postulated by van Gennep (1960) this period could be described as the beginning of the separation phase. The question that comes to mind is: How do widows experience this stage of the funeral ceremony—the arrival of the deceased’s body?

The Night Vigil—the Last Farewell

Once the body has been placed comfortably and *most* respectfully next to the widow, a short but most powerful prayer service is held. This service replaces the daily service that had been in place throughout the mourning period. This prayer service welcomes home the deceased for the last time, to bid farewell to his family, his home and community.

After the home-coming ceremony, most of the mourners disperse to their respective homes to get themselves ready for the night vigil. The night vigil begins in the late hours of the night, usually around midnight. The night vigil is evidenced by the most powerful singing of funeral dirges, preaching sermons, prayers, comforting and encouraging words, biblical verses; testimonies and eulogies of the deceased. Time and again during the night vigil, some keening and most mournful dirges are heard; these are usually instigated by a certain Biblical verse or a special hymnal selection, usually those that were in the deceased’s favor evoking memories for the family. The night vigil ends with the viewing of the deceased’s body in the early hours of the morning.

The Morning of Burial

The night vigil is interrupted by an announcement by a religious minister or an elder who would have been asked to declare; “*it is time to view the body.*” I specifically use the term interrupted because the mourners would be so deeply and emotionally absorbed in singing religious hymns that somebody needs to conscientize them to another reality—viewing of the body. The widow will now garbed all-in-black, navy blue or green (*a routse*) is requested to lead the mourners for viewing of the deceased’s body.

This is another critical moment during which the widow is supported by two women, in case she collapses at the sight of her deceased husband. This is another moment of *raw reality* to the widow-face to face with death. It is important to note that there are other ritual performances that would have been undertaken with the widow during the night and the early hours of the morning, to prepare her psychologically for her husband departure. All these rituals mark the end. Their nature is only known to the participants and the elders performing them. This is still the transition stage postulated by van Gennep (1960).

Journey to the Gravesite

Once mourner have viewed the body; another announcement is made that; “we are now taking the deceased to his home.” Thus, the funeral procession heads for the graveyard in a set order. The lead car is for minister/s of religion, the hearse with the deceased, the widow and her caregiver come next. The family cars then follow and the rest of the general mourners’ vehicles; come in any, but most respectful order. No car should pass the other unnecessarily; the movement of cars to the graveyard is most graceful. As well, any person walking by the roadside immediately kneels or sits down in

respect of the funeral procession. This is a cultural norm and an obligation in village settings. The norm is becoming extinct in the urban settings.

At the Graveyard

On reaching the graveyard, the widow and her party are ushered to a special tent shade arranged for them close to the burial site. The tent-shade protects the bereaved from any unfavorable weather conditions that may prevail on that day. Chairs are provided for the bereaved family to make themselves comfortable throughout the burial ceremony. Some elderly members may prefer to sit on a mat on the ground, as a matter of tradition or preference. This is special care and tribute paid to the bereaved family. The tent-shade is placed in such a way that it allows full view of the whole burial process for the family and close relatives. The family must see all that happens to the end, and satisfy themselves that they saw it all happen.

The full view of the whole burial process helps the bereaved family members achieve closure (Wolfelt, n. d.). The rest of the mourners surround the grave, still maintaining gender and age differences. The minister of religion calls mourners to order, blesses the grave, and encourages the choristers to sing with utmost passion, as this is the most difficult and critical part of the ceremony for the family—the actual burial. This part of the ceremony gradually prepares the bereaved for the final moment of their loved one's departure—the burial.

The Burial-Grand Finale

The coffin is then gradually and gracefully lowered to the floor of the grave by the funeral director. Depending on the socio-economic status of the family or by mere preference, the coffin may be planted manually on the grave floor by men. Once the

coffin is planted at the floor of the grave, the widow, once again is asked to lead the family and close relatives to say their final *goodbyes*. This is one role that defines the widow as the chief mourner. No other person can play this role. The final *goodbyes* are initiated by the widow, symbolically *kicking-in*, in a backward fashion some portion of the earth into the grave. This is cultural behavior, also intended to reduce the chances of the widow gravitating to the grave as she yearns for her husband.

The rest of the family members and relatives throw in a portion of earth by hand and say their final words to the deceased. This is another moment that is witnessed with renewed keening, and heightened wailing, of most heart-wrenching in nature. Some most mournful dirges will be also heard from the elderly women. This behavior is acceptable at this time of the burial ceremony. The PWLC (2005) indicates that rituals determine how grief should be expressed, privately or loudly.

During this time, once again, the widow is physically supported by two physically strong women in case she too collapses due to the excruciating pain of loss, general weakness from the rawness of death, and the reality of the final departure of her deceased husband. It is not uncommon for children to wail uncontrollably and become almost violent during this time; men come round to assist in restraining these hysterical children. At this time gender differences are relaxed for this purpose. The singing of the religious songs is pitched to the highest level possible, to comfort specifically the bereaved family.

Instantaneously, and in the most respectful and graceful manner, the grave is gradually filled with earth. The filling up of the grave is done by men only; it is taboo for women to fill in the grave. Once the grave is filled to the brim there is sudden and *grave*

silence from the family and relatives, probably a sign of “letting-go.” This is the final step of the separation stage as presented by van Gennep’s (1960) tripartite stage process.

Once the burial is over, the minister of religion once again blesses the grave and announces that the burial is over; and expresses gratitude for all those who participated in all the ceremonial activities during the active mourning period. The younger women of the deceased’s clan are then requested to read condolence messages, and place flowers on the grave top. An elderly woman—usually a relative is requested to break some eating utensils over the grave—a cup and a plate. The same elderly woman sprinkles some gourd seeds or sorghum grains on the grave top; she breaks also a gourd full of water on the grave top. The water is intended for the deceased to drink on his *long* journey to the ancestral world. The seeds or grains are expected to germinate during the rainy season, symbolizing new life for both the deceased and the surviving family. The plate and the cup communicate to the ancestors that the deceased was well cared for; he had a plate to eat from and a cup to drink water with, specifically when he was sick.

The funeral procession heads back for the death homestead in reverse order. The widow and her family are given preference to pass all other cars so that they can reach the homestead before all other mourners to undertake the necessary preliminary cleansing.

Back at Home –After the Burial

Positioned by both sides of the gate to the house, is herb-treated water in a bowl which the mourners *must* use to cleanse themselves by symbolically washing their hands. The widow cleanses herself first once she reaches the homestead, followed by her family

and the closest of kin. All those who had been to the burial are expected to undertake the symbolical cleansing ritual.

Once again, age and gender differences become vivid as mourners occupy different places in the compound. There is still no mixing between man and women at this time unless there is some important message to be relayed. Each cohort takes up either age or gender appropriate roles as they serve mourners with refreshments, and undertake their final duties of support to the bereaved family. This is a role usually played by the younger female members of the society, under the direction of some village elder. During serving of refreshments, a community leader—in most cases the village headman (*Rra-Legkotla*), gives a vote of thanks, followed by the announcement of *letsididi*! Literally translated to English *letsididi* means—“*be cooled*,” pronouncing community healing.

By this time, the widow is free from *go ribama*; she is seated outside the house with some elderly women mentors, who silently, but vigilantly watch how she is coping with her loss. These women will talk about all the general life events except the death that has just occurred to the family. As Yasmen-Esmael and Rubin (2005) put it, “in general those who come to console the bereaved do not spend much time talking about death so as not to intensify the sense of bereavement and woe, or to remind mourners of their loss, instead subjects that will comfort the bereaved are discussed” (p. 506).

Weaning off, Support from the Bereaved Family.

Once *letsididi* has been announced, gradually, in groups of two or three mourners begin to depart the deceased homestead for their respective homes. It should be noted that *no one* will leave the compound before *letsididi* has been announced. If they do, they will

continue to feel spiritually connected to the deceased for some time until they hear another announcement of *letsididi* (healing) in a different burial ceremony—only then will they feel spiritually liberated.

What follows is the great exodus which indicates that “it is finished.” The widow and her family are now being gradually weaned off, of the support they enjoyed throughout the active mourning period before the burial. They will continue to have minimal support and visitations as death becomes distant to the minds of mourners. The widow’s mother, her mother-in-law and some very close relatives remain behind with the widow for a few days, but sooner, they also leave for their respective homes. The close relatives will occasionally visit the widow at calculated and alternate times, so that the widow is not left alone for too long without social and emotional support. Before taking a longer leave away from the widow, elders shave the heads of the family members, starting with the widow. This is another indication that she is the chief mourner.

Shaving Heads- Initial Cleansing

The shaving of the widow’s hair is part of the initial cleansing, and a way also of psychologically separating the widow from her deceased husband; thus removing the hair she had whilst he was alive. This hair is buried by the elders in a distant place, indicating that her husband has gone to a ‘far-away land,’ and never to return.

Once all the necessary rituals of hair-shaving have been completed, the first group of mourners leaves. This is to ensure that they can take time off, and come back to relieve those that had remained behind supporting the widow. In between these times, the widow continues to have visitations from friends, and some ministers of religion, and her own

spiritual group—if she is an active church member. This is community support to the widow through her grief journey.

Observance of Communal Taboos

The elderly women caution the widow strongly about observance of taboos; what she can or cannot do during the mourning period. This is to make sure that she does not falter in observing cultural taboos, in which case she may be confronted with “disgustful rejection” from her community. The elderly women together with the widow deliberate on the length of time that she wishes to mourn her husband. A date for the cleansing ceremony is then scheduled based on the information provided by the widow.

The elderly women then impress once more, on the importance of observing strictly, the prescribed cultural taboos. They also let the widow aware that they will be available to provide her with any information and support that she may need throughout her mourning period. The widow remains under subtle but extremely strict surveillance from her neighbors, while in mourning, and she is not allowed *certain freedoms* until she is finally cleansed; for example, intimate relationships or going to entertainment places like night clubs.

The Cleansing Ceremony

As the date for cleansing draws nearer, preparations for the ceremony are commenced. Elderly relatives usually arrive a day or two before the ceremony to make the necessary arrangements for cleansing. Specifically, the elderly women brew traditional beer; this is their culturally prescribed role also. This beer takes approximately two to three days to be ready for consumption. These elderly ladies, at the same time take the opportunity to educate the widow to be emotionally ready for the ceremony, including

the manner in which she will present herself throughout the ceremony, before the community of gatherers.

This ceremony usually brings back memories of her dead husband, since during this day; his personal belongings are retrieved and shared among relatives. It should be remembered that all the deceased's belongings and (sometimes) those of the widow also, are stored away after the burial, only to be retrieved on the cleansing day.

The cleansing ritual is conducted by a traditional healer, spiritual healer or an elder who is experienced in cleansing ceremonies. The cleansing entails some purging herbs, and some bathing treatments specifically for the widow. She then removes the mourning garb, and is dressed in a new set of clothing purchased by her in-laws. The mourning garb is taken away for burial by the elder who was charged with conducting the cleansing ceremony. The cleansing ceremony is usually held after three (3) months, six (6) months, or twelve (12) months following the burial. The length of the mourning period depends on the age of the widow; the younger the widow, the shorter the mourning period. The cleansing ceremony, thus lifts all the mourning taboos, and renders the widow free of all her death defilement and mourning behavior, and is now free to interact with the mainstream society.

Summary of Chapter II

The chapter addressed the theoretical underpinnings that guided this investigation, (e.g. attachment theory, the bio ecological model, and the tasks of mourning) in relation to the experience of death. Attachment theory is particularly emphasized in this enquiry, because death tends to disrupt affectional bonds that are formed over time, causing the bereaved to reach out with searching behavior when they incur loss of a loved one. To

have a better understanding of the bereaved's feelings, emotions, and behavior in grief, it is important to understand attachment theory.

The bioecological model is applied also in this study, because the society of Botswana is community-oriented; joy and sorrow are shared in common. The spirit of community in Botswana is expressed in all aspects of life; hence, there is a popular saying; "*motho ke motho ka batho*," when translated literally to English, it means that an individual is who he/she is because of other people. According to the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) an individual affects and is affected by their proximal and distal environments. The bioecological model is presented in this enquiry because the theme is death, and cultural rituals which are relevant at this time. The cultural rituals and the responses to death are inherent and guided by the culture of Botswana. Death does not only involve one individual, but in closely knit settings like small rural villages the whole neighboring community is affected. Therefore, due to its diversity in human dynamics, the bioecological model is well fitting for this piece of research.

The tasks of mourning have been described as well in this investigation. The tasks of mourning assist the reader to appreciate that every bereaved individual needs to walk the journey of grief in order to achieve healing. Accordingly, the tasks of mourning need to be undertaken by all grieving persons to achieve healing.

In this chapter, the cultural responses to death have been discussed, and the way families and bereaved widows make meaning from loss. Making a meaning out of what is usually described as a "senseless" event, helps grieving people to face life in the absence of the deceased. The functions of cultural rituals have also been discussed. The chronologic stages of the death process by the Bakalanga ethnic group have been

addressed, from the time of death through to the cleansing period. These traditional systems help, *not* only the widow but the surrounding community to deal with the death of a significant person in their midst. The tripartite stage process by van Gennep (1960) has been addressed in this study, as a process inherent in any event of death or any rite of passage ceremony.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

In this chapter I described the method and research design used to examine the lived experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourned the deaths of their husbands. The research method and design, research instruments and sampling procedures have been discussed. Ethical issues and protection of subjects' rights were addressed under the heading, "recruitment procedures." The data collection methods, data analysis, and the limitations of the study were discussed. This is a qualitative investigation using an ethnographic approach. These constructs associated with qualitative and ethnography have been described below as they guided this investigation.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible.

These practices transform the world. They turn the world into series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (p. 4).

Ethnography is selected as a method of choice for this study because it describes the people of Botswana and their cultural behaviors and practices during their mourning of a significant family member—which is a husband for the purposes of this inquiry.

According to Patton (2002) ethnography, the primary method of anthropology is the earliest distinct tradition of qualitative inquiry. Marvasti (2004) on the other hand, defines ethnography as observing, participating in and recording a people's way of life. Furthermore, Marvasti emphasizes the three dimensions of ethnography as being; involvement with and participation in the topic being studied, attention to the social context of data collection, and sensitivity to how subjects are presented in the research text. Vidich and Lyman (2000) state that the "notion of culture central to ethnography is devoted to describing ways of humankind....a social specific description of a people hood" (p. 38). This study examined the experiences of widows in Botswana, regarding the performance of traditional rituals as they mourned the death of their husbands. The study sought also to find out what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was: how can knowledge and insights gained from the findings of this study begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

Conceptual Framework

Choosing a Qualitative Method

Several renowned researchers and authors of qualitative literature suggest that an investigator needs to determine a rationale for choosing a qualitative approach to research (Creswell 1997; Patton 2001; van Manen, 1997). Moreover, these experts offer guidelines that one needs to follow when undertaking a qualitative investigation. According to Creswell (1997) "in a qualitative research study, the question often starts with *how* or *what*, so that initial forays into the topic describe what is going on" (p. 17). Patton (2001)

suggests that the philosophical tradition of an investigation should serve the question under investigation.

In this study attention was paid to the descriptions, expressions, and perceptions of widows in relation to their involvement in the performance of traditional rituals to help them heal after the loss of their husbands to death. Countless research studies were conducted with widows in the past which paid attention to the *why*, or compared groups, thus using a quantitative approach to research. As a result the deeper meanings of lived experiences remained untapped through the utility of such approaches. In this study, the qualitative approach is applied because “there is a need to present a detailed view of the topic” under study (Creswell, 1997, p. 17). The topic under study is the cultural response of Batswana following the death of a husband.

Goodenough (1971) portrays culture as that “collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitute standards or what is, standards for deciding what can be, and standards for deciding how one feels about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it “ (p. 21-22). Such standards as those described above, become vivid during a funeral ceremony in Botswana through the distinct utility of cultural rituals. With all these highlights at the back of the mind, a qualitative inquiry using an ethnographic approach to research was selected as the best fit for this investigation.

In their discussion of the ethnographic approach to research, (Millar, Hengst, & Wang, 2003, p. 219) emphasized that “ethnographic approaches are oriented to study meanings; and meanings are understood to be structured by culture-that is by collectively shared and transmitted symbols, understandings, and ways of being.” In this study the intention was to illuminate meanings associated with the cultural symbols displayed at

the time of death, and to understand also the events surrounding death of a husband from the widows' reflections of those events. Thus, widows will be understood from their nature of point of view (Malinowski, 1921). The study was carried out with individuals in their natural environment because removing the participants from their setting usually leads to contrived findings which are out of context (Creswell, 1997).

An expert in phenomenological methods, van Manen (1997) states that “the methodology is the theory behind the method, including the study of what method one should follow and why” (p. 27-28). Therefore, to understand the experiences of widows and deeper meaning they attach to cultural rituals; a qualitative inquiry of an ethnographic nature appeared most suitable for this study. As Creswell (1997) aptly put it “the wide-angle lens or the distant panoramic shot will not suffice to present answers to the problem or the close up view does not exist (p. 17). Since this investigation involves the way people interact with one another, make and share meanings from these interactions, a methodological concept that was considered for this study also, is Symbolic interactionism which is discussed in the next section.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective that places great emphasis on the importance of meaning and interpretations as essential human processes, in reaction against behaviorism and mechanical stimulus-response psychology (Patton, 2001, p. 112). During a funeral ceremony in Botswana, there are several customary and symbolic acts that are undertaken. Inherent in them are certain meanings for both the widow and her community. This is an important concept to consider when dealing with a community-oriented society such as Botswana. In this study examining the

experiences of widows in relation to the performance of cultural rituals; not only are the symbolic acts visible, but there are ways in which the community interacts verbally and non-verbally in a funeral ceremony, still with shared meanings. The community gathers for these customary practices as a matter of expectation and a way of life. A perfect example is the initial congregation of the community in response to the event of death, as well as the symbolic hand washing for all those who attended the burial (to mention a few). All these behavioral acts have a meaning for both the widow and the mourners. Thus, have a bearing on how each party will react to the other in the future, depending on how the bereaved observed or did not observe the set cultural standards. According to Patton (2001) “people create shared meanings through their interactions and those meanings become a reality” (p.112). In Botswana the meaning attached to widowhood primarily is that of community pollution, which is believed to be responsible for monstrous and lethal illnesses if not attended to traditionally. As result, if a widow is not cleansed as expected, the community will relate to her in ways that communicate this reality in their lives, possibly ostracizing her.

Methodology and Instrumentation

This qualitative investigation using an ethnographic approach, relied primarily on focus group discussions, complemented by individual interviews of key informants, and my own observation as the researcher. The nature of this inquiry carries a high possibility of re-awakening painful memories; for this particular reason special precautions were taken to ensure participant protection. This involved having in place, trained counselors during group discussions, in case somebody got overwhelmed by emotions, then they

would intervene. This was done in observance of the recommendations made by the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Methods

Focus Group Interviews

Data for this study was obtained through the use of focus group discussions. Focus groups have several advantages for qualitative inquiry: (a) they engage people of similar interests or backgrounds in the discussion of a specific research issue, (b) data collection is cost effective, producing rapid flexible in-depth data, (c) interactions among participants enhance quality of data, (d) they utilize the social aspect of human interaction, (e) allows for probing, re-visiting and clarifying emerging understandings and concerns (Krueger, 1994; Levers 2006; Patton, 2001). Krueger popularly known as a focus group expert describes a focus group as a “carefully planned” activity designed to “obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive and non-threatening environment” (p. 6). Krueger stresses further that, focus groups are conducted by a skilled interviewer, for whom he prefers to use the term, moderator.

I conducted two focus groups with the assistance of a colleague, and paid special attention to creating a safe and relaxed environment for participants, by reminding them of the importance of confidentiality, and protection of their rights. Participants had the freedom to express how they felt during the discussion and that they would be exempted from participating if they were having a hard time during the focus group discussions. The language used was the local *Ikalanga*, with which the participants were comfortable. The questions were simplified to the level of the participants’ understanding. Both focus group discussions were video-recorded with participants’ permission, including one face-

to-face individual interview. The rest of the individual interviews are discussed in the next section.

Key Informant Interviews

I conducted seven individual interviews with key informants. Three key informants were identified from the focus group discussions and four were identified in the village with assistance of VDC members. Key informants provide the researcher with information that is not directly observable, as well as explanations for events the observer has not actually witnessed (Patton 2001). The key informants were identified as those members of the focus group who were open to discussing issues of traditional cultural tradition and death, which are hardly ever brought to table in the culture of Botswana. The key informants also provided insights regarding meanings attached to some major symbolic acts that are undertaken during mourning. These are cultural acts which were described extensively during the focus group discussions, but were not fully addressed in terms of meanings attached to them.

Key informants were widows who had authority and command of traditional culture and practices, and also having lived the experience of widowhood. Patton (2001) highlights that “key informants are people who are knowledgeable about the inquiry setting, and articulate about their knowledge—people whose insights can prove particularly useful in helping the observer understand what is happening and why” (p. 321). The information obtained from the key informants was triangulated against the data that was gathered through focus groups discussions, which is cited by (Levers, 2005) as enhancing the trustworthiness of the investigation results.

Researcher Observation

Participant observation is one of the methods I used to gather data during focus group discussions. It is important to note that my observation of events began when I conducted preliminary visit to the villages where participants hailed from. This observation helped me to understand the lines and nature of communication in a village setting, and this helped me to be sensitive not only to the subject for discussion but the general culture of the village. Patton (2001) argues that “to understand fully the complexities of many situations, direct participant observation in and observation of the phenomenon of interest may be the best research method” (p. 21). Participant observation was helpful for me in triangulating and refining the data during the analytic process. I was able to identify participants suited for the individual interviews through this observational process. Observing participants relate with exceptional intensity, their experiences regarding cultural rituals following the loss of their husbands, enabled me to get a general impression of the meanings associated with the performance of cultural rituals in response to the death of a husband, and the roles they play in the day-to-day lives of these widows.

The Researcher as an Instrument

My own experience constituted being an unsanctioned widow, which meant also that the traditional protocol could not be observed with me when my (then ex) husband died in 1998. The specific reason for my status as an unsanctioned widow was that we were legally divorced, although sometimes cultural practices can diffuse such boundaries, if the elders collectively agree on such an arrangement.

As a young girl, I grew up under the socialization and care of my grandmother in rural Zimbabwe, the then Rhodesia. Each day, there were minor or major rituals that my grandmother and her clan performed, depending on the prevailing situation. I became wholly involved in this traditional way of life, and learnt that if I do not do things in a certain expected way, then I will be vulnerable to some mystical forces of the invisible world. These practices and beliefs became so intricately woven into my life that I could not separate myself from it, regardless of my social status or academic attainment.

As a consequence of the above traditional customs, attending to my ex-husband's funeral, without "protective" customary behaviors, posed a real threat to my life. I felt very vulnerable to invisible forces, about which I had heard a lot during my childhood. This belief system became animated when I was faced with trouble in my life, the death of a person very close to my heart-- my ex-husband. Additionally, during his lifetime, we had undertaken several rituals together; accordingly, when he died there were supposed to be undoing rituals to break the spiritual bond that we had. With this realization, I became a true indigenous African and sank deep into my cultural roots. My basic need was to feel safe and be protected from the dangerous and unseen forces of the universe, most importantly to be accepted as a member of my community. This would be impossible without having observed the cultural protocol.

The feeling of insecurity derived from a commonly and strongly held belief that if a widow does not undergo death rituals, she may be drawn to the deceased possibly by forces that killed her husband, and she also may contaminate the community with death defilement, known in the local language as *boswagadi*. This feeling of vulnerability and possible rejection from my community raised my interest in conducting an investigation

of this nature. I felt an internal drive to find out more about the deeper meanings inherent in cultural structures and the actual performance of rituals following the death of a husband.

In addition to my own existential concerns, tacit knowledge had it that my ex-husband was not accorded a respectful funeral. Consequently, I feared for the wrath of ancestors over the family. The first action that I could undertake, at the earliest available moment, was to seek traditional protection in the form of cleansing; after engaging in this ritual, I immediately felt safe in my surroundings, with renewed energy and a sense of belonging in my community.

The void in my life following this state of affairs raised my interest in undertaking this investigation. Of particular interest to me was to find out about the aspect of respect, the feeling of security, and the support drawn from the performance and essential nature of the traditional rituals. I learned also that a person becomes what they believe in, and nothing could come between them and their belief system, especially one that was acquired during their childhood. Particularly, I wanted to know to whom the element of respect is accorded. The questions that came to mind were: (a) Do the widows mourning the death of their husbands indeed feel secure, respected, cared for, and supported by their elders when rituals of death are undertaken on their behalf? (b) What does involvement in cultural rituals mean to the widow and her community? (c) What additional supports or comforts are enjoyed by the widow through the performance of rituals?(d) Finally, I wanted to find out how the traditional approach to grieving widows can be combined with professional counseling interventions, in this era of modern living.

I am a trained psychiatric/mental health nurse; this training has helped me to realize that people may react very differently to a “similar situation,” with possible long-term effects on their psyches. I also hold a Post Graduate Diploma in Counselor Education, which also has shed light on my understanding of human development across the life span. As a counselor, I have learnt that a caring individual can help people devastated by developmental situations find hope and look forward to life with a renewed purpose. The doctoral program that I undertook in counselor education and supervision was of extra benefit in my life. This program has helped me to look first into my own life and situations before I can lend a helping hand to another person. Consequently, my own experience of widowhood helped me translate the emotions and feelings to other people in difficult situations, thus gaining better and deeper understandings of their experiences. All of these academic achievements that I have attained, as well as the developmental crises that I endured in my life, have guided my focus for this study. I am an altruistic person by nature; the education that I acquired as well as the experiences that I have lived through, have enhanced my personal virtues and attributes; these have all served in illuminating the various dimensions of this study.

Sampling Procedures

A non-probability sampling procedure was used to identify participants for this investigation (Merriam 1998. According to Polit and Hungler (1996) purposive sampling is based on the assumption that a researcher’s knowledge can be used to handpick the samples to be included in the study. The researcher might decide purposely to select the widest possible variety of respondents, or might choose subjects who are judged to be typical of the population in question, or particularly knowledgeable about the issue under

study. The characteristic participants that were deliberately selected for this study were widows who had undertaken, and completed all the traditional mourning practices according to the set cultural standards in Botswana.

Study Setting and Participant Selection

The study was conducted in two rural villages in Botswana, one situated in the North East District and the other in the Central District. Both villages are located a few miles from the Botswana-Zimbabwe border. The composition in these villages is mainly the *Bakalanga* ethnic group with and a few members of the *Ndebele* and Batswana ethnicities.

Botswana was a British Protectorate until the 30th day of September 1966, when she achieved her political sovereignty (Parsons, 1998). Botswana is a landlocked country in the southern hemisphere of Africa whose population is estimated at 1,700,000 according to 2006 estimate. Botswana is commonly described as shaped like, and about the size of Texas (US) with a land surface area of 224,607 square miles (581,730 square kilometers (Booi, 2006). This land-locked territory is generally described as the “gem of Africa,” due to her large reservoir of diamonds. Botswana is the world’s third largest exporter of diamonds. When she acquired her independence in 1966, Botswana was one of the world poorest countries of the world (Parsons, 1998). The diamond industry boosted Botswana’s economy; hence she is now popularly described as one of the most economically stable countries in Africa (Tsie, 1996). Politically she is described as a “shining example of democracy in Africa” because of her long standing tradition of democratic rule; respect for ethnic and racial differences, freedom of press and

government support for developmental programs (Denbow & Thebe, 2006; Tsie, 1996; Parsons, 1998).

Botswana's legal system takes after the Roman Dutch law (Booi, 2006) but has continued to maintain the customary law as well. These two legal systems have been in operation side by side since independence with minimal problems. The customary courts enforce law at rural level, and are involved also in village and social development. Hence each village has a Village Development Committee, whose members are well informed about all activities and events within the village--they are the village gate-keepers.

As a developing country, Botswana has 20% of her population residing in urban cities whilst 75% occupies the rural and some semi-urban areas. Socially, Botswana is a multi-ethnic society which is composed of more than 26 ethnic groups (Chilisa 2005). The major ethnic group is the *Ba-tswana* (Booi, 2006). Each of these ethnic groups has their own customs, tradition, and cultural practices. The different religious denominations permeate all these ethnic groups as well; nonetheless Batswana have continued to live in harmony with each other. Intertwined within these ethnic groups are the different political party affiliations which though, evident in day to day lives of Batswana, have never caused any significant problems that characterize most of Africa's bloodshed, emanating from tribal and ethnic wars in those countries that have a multi-party system.

Generally speaking, Botswana is also known as the most peaceful country in Africa, inspite the various ethnic, religious or political groupings, people still live together and are strongly guided by the spirit of peace with one another. All these different ways in which Batswana conduct their lives have implications the counseling.

Being a land-locked country, Botswana experienced the spill-over of political and economic problems of her neighbors. Examples include South Africa's apartheid rule in the early 1960's, Angola's civil wars in the early 1970s and of late, Zimbabwe with her drastic economic recession, and the resultant humongous influx of refugees into Botswana.

On the other hand, Botswana has enjoyed the convergence of other nations into her territory, which is attributed to her political, economic, and socially stability (Tsie, 1996). As a result there has been a marked cultural exchange and information, assimilations of various lifestyles from the neighboring countries in all spheres of life. Naturally, change brings with it both the negative and positive consequences, so it has been with Botswana. These new ideas have a bearing on the lives of Botswana and still with greater implications for psychosocial services.

Due to its flexible and relaxed border laws, some major religious denominations from across the neighboring nations, especially South Africa have infiltrated into Botswana; bringing with them a significant change in the manner of worship for Botswana which further influences their lifestyle. These are the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC), The Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) and the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa (UCCSA) to mention a few. Interestingly this people continue to submit to their cultural tradition and practices. All these different lifestyles have a tremendous effect on the lives of Botswana, with profound implications for counseling.

The goal of this piece of research was to find out how widows in Botswana experienced the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as

they mourned the death of their husbands. The study sought to find out, what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in grieving widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was: how can insights and knowledge gained from the results of this study begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

Selection of Participants

Participants involved in this investigation were widows who were 6 months to five years past the death of their husbands. They had undergone and completed all the mourning rites according to the set cultural standards in the country. These widows were aged 25-68 years, instead of the age limit of 55 years that I had initially required for participants.

The first focus group discussion participants, hailed from Village A in the North East district, and those for the second group, hailed from Village B in the Central district. One key informant was identified during the first focus group, two were identified during the second focus group discussion and the remaining four were identified in the village, after the second group discussion. They were not part of the focus group discussions, but agreed to participate in individual interviews as key informants. Concerning academic attainment, 12 had attended up to elementary school level; six of these participants had attended only part and not all the years required for a high school diploma, and only one had attained a higher level diploma.

As stated earlier on, both these villages are situated close to the Botswana-Zimbabwe political border and comprised mostly of the *Bakalanga* people tinted by a few of the *Ndebele* and *Batswana* tribes. I selected this group because I am more

conversant with their way of life more than any other ethnic group in the country. I was raised among the *Bakalanga* ethnic, group which closely relates to my own tribe which is the *Ndebele*; in terms of cultural practices and general ways of life.

The selection and identification of participants for the study was sought through the tribal authorities in each of the villages, with the help of the Village Development Committee members and village elders. A letter of invitation and willingness to participate in the study was given to each of those participants who showed interest in being part of the study. Willingness to participate was evidenced by signing a consent form that was designed and distributed by me--the researcher. The expectations for participating in the study were explained to the participants in the simplest terms possible. Finally, the participants were allowed time to ask questions to ensure a fuller comprehension of their involvement in the focus group discussions, as well as being key informant interviewees.

Ethical Issues and Participant's Rights

The consideration of ethical issues and participants' rights was addressed through submission of documentation and the proposal drawn for the study to the Duquesne University (DU) Institutional Review Board (IRB). This documentation included the consent form which delineated participants' rights, protection of privacy, and confidentiality issues. However it was clarified to participants that it is difficult to ensure absolute confidentiality in a group setting (Corey & Corey, 2005).

Once the proposal was approved by the IRB for me to conduct the investigation, I sought permission from the Government of Botswana to conduct the study in the country, through Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Home Affairs (Appendix A). Having

been granted permission to conduct the study, I wrote another letter of request to the tribal authorities (Appendix G), to be allowed to undertake the investigation in the villages under their jurisdiction. An invitation to participants through a transmittal letter (Appendix D) was extended to potential participants during the invitational meeting. Participants who indicated interest in the study were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix E) as evidence of willingness to participate in the focus group discussion and individual interviews.

Included in the consent form was the full disclosure about the investigation; assurance of confidentiality, and privacy protection procedures. Particularly, the participants were informed that they can withdraw from the study at any time they chose to, and that their withdrawal would not affect their private life or their future relationships with the investigator. The benefits and potential risks of participating in the study were spelt out to participants; for this reason, counselors were put in place to intervene in case a group member became overwrought during deliberations. Participants were also informed that there would be no identifying information in the transcripts. Accordingly, pseudo names were assigned to participants to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

A summary of the findings would be sent to participants at no cost if they so requested and they were required to provide a self-addressed envelope for this purpose. All the records relating to the investigation were kept in the researcher's office, in a locked cabinet at the University of Botswana. Back in Pittsburgh, all the materials were kept in a locked cabinet in the researcher's study room. All the materials and data collected for the research were destroyed at the completion of the study.

Research Design

The design for this inquiry is a qualitative examination using an ethnographic approach. The goal of this inquiry was to investigate the lived experiences of widows in Botswana, in relation to the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement, as they mourned the deaths of their husbands. Furthermore, the study sought to find out what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was: how can knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation, begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

The ethnographic approach to research is now discussed in the following section, including a synopsis of the theoretical underpinnings related to this study. In ethnography, the researcher examines the group's observable, learned patterns of behavior and ways of life (Creswell, 2001). Additionally, Marvasti (2004) described qualitative inquiries as methodological techniques for analyzing nuances, or the quality of human experience. Based on these premises, the bioecological model and the symbolic integrationist approach were applied in this investigation, because both approaches consider the interrelatedness, interconnectedness, and the interdependence within and among the systems in which the individual operates.

The bioecological model is described as an evolving theoretical system for the scientific study of human development over time. Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined development as a phenomenon of continuity and change in the bio-psychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon

extends over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present.

In his bioecological model, Bronfenbrenner describes a series of concentric circles, where the smallest circle in the centre is the individual of interest, which is the widow in the context of this inquiry. Within this model the widow is referred to as being in a nested environment. The widow, who contains various systems within herself is at the centre of the nest, surrounded by layers which contain significant individuals, and groups of individuals in each layer. The bioecological model is thus applied in this inquiry because Botswana is community-oriented society, and these systems interact with each other from time to time in the life of the individual, specifically in difficult times such as death of a family member.

Accordingly, the individual described here as the microsystem (widow), affects and is affected by other systems that nest her. In the context of Botswana, these systems are the immediate mesosystem consisting of the family and neighbors; the exosystem which is made up of the social system (e.g. the school and the work environments); and the macrosystem which constitutes the culture, norms and the law. Energy within the bioecological system is thus visualized to flow in both directions which is from the centre of the circle outward and vice versa (Boemmel & Briscoe, 2001).

Due to a predominantly interdependent way of life in Botswana, death of a community member becomes a concern for all. Additionally in a community oriented society such as Botswana is, there are shared meanings created through interactions, and these meanings have become a reality for this people (Patton 2001). Thus the concept of symbolic interactionism is well suited here, if one acknowledges the nature and manner

in which the cultural rituals are undertaken following the death of a husband. These cultural procedures have special meanings to the community so that if they are performed or not performed, they will affect the way the community reacts and behaves towards the widow in the future. While the ceremonial acts are undertaken specifically with, and for the widow, they harbor deeply buried meanings and have implications for the neighboring community as well

In view of this, the design of this investigation, which is a qualitative inquiry utilizing an ethnographic approach, has taken into consideration all the factors in the widow's environment that have a bearing on her life, not only as a widow but all of her life course (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Data Collection

Data collection for this investigation was done in the month of December 2007, in Botswana and involved two focus groups, seven key informant interviews conducted by telephone, and my own observation as the researcher. Krueger (n. d.) a website article suggests that, since there is less time for telephone interviews, only four to six people are recruited and the number of questions is limited.

Data collection followed after the invitational meetings with authorities in villages A and B. During the preliminary visits, I sought for assistance from the Village Development Committee (VDC) members and some village elders to identify potential study participants on my behalf. According to Millar et al. (2003) "in remote and isolated sites, the very survival of the researcher may depend on the strengths of the relationships the researcher has been able to forge and the goodwill of the community members under study" (p. 223). Accordingly, in these two villages I depended on my previous

relationships with the village authorities, and some of the local people in these two villages for the success of data collection exercise.

During each meeting, I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my visit. I then went onto explain the purpose of the study, the ethical issues, including participants' privacy rights as mentioned above (ethical issues and rights of subjects). These elements were reinforced on the day of data collection. The focus group discussions were video-recorded with participant's permission. The language that was used for all the interviews was the *Ikalanga*, with which the participants were comfortable.

Regarding the capturing of data for individual interviews, only one key informant, face-to-face interview was video-recorded. The rest of the interviews were paper and pencil notes taken during telephone conversations. The telephone interviews were the next possible method of data collection, because the participants indicated that they had no more time to spend for another meeting following the focus group discussion. I then, suggested telephone interview which they readily accepted, and I was to request only thirty minutes of their time. According to Krueger (n. d.) a website article, telephone interviews can be done when people are scattered all over the country.

Participants for this study were not scattered per se, but had to go and gather the *mophane* worm, or cultivate their fields, which is another cultural expectation for this people. Thus, participant who were identified and consented to be key informants, were given the questionnaire to look at before the interview date. Krueger (n. d.) a website article, suggests that interview questions can be sent out ahead of time; which seems to make the short time available more productive. Sending out questions ahead of time, helps interviewees to know which direction the interview will lead, and know what to

say. This helps the interviewees to stick with the interviewer mentally, when he/she is not physically there.

The focus group approach was the method of choice in this inquiry primarily for the following reasons: the inquiry involved a sensitive issue of loss through death which Batswana do not generally discuss openly; additionally the cultural tradition and practices are relegated to a lower position in the social lives of Batswana, as a result many people may be hesitant and unwilling to talk freely about cultural issues as individuals. In a group people draw support from one another. Focus groups can be of an advantage when interactions among interviewees will likely yield best information, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (Krueger 1994).

Two interview protocols were developed; one for use with focus groups (Appendix B) and another for individual interviews (Appendix C), and consisted of open-ended questions that related to the main research question. The open ended questions allowed me to exercise some flexibility in addressing issues that were not anticipated before data collection. Open-ended questions “yield direct quotations from the people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” (Patton, 2001, p. 4). Furthermore Patton reiterates that open-ended responses allow the researcher to “understand the world from the participant’s points of view without prior selection of the questionnaire categories” (p. 21).

One other major advantage of using open-ended questions is that they “reveal what is on the interviewee’s mind as opposed to what the interviewer suspects is on the interviewee’s mind” (Krueger (1998, p. 60). Krueger accentuates that, open-ended question allow the respondent to choose the direction they want to respond from, and also

provide an opportunity for the respondent to answer from a broader perspective. Thus, open-ended questions provided a framework within which participants had the liberty to respond in a way that ‘accurately and thoroughly’ represented their points of views about their experiences, concerning the loss of their husbands to death (Patton 2001, p. 2).

Duration of Interviews

Each of the focus group discussion was between sixty to ninety minutes in length. The video-recorded key informant interview was sixty minutes in length and the rest of the individual interviews conducted through the telephone lasted for thirty minutes each. Krueger (n. d.) in a website article informs us that telephone focus groups are shorter, have fewer participants and fewer questions than in-person focus groups; suggesting one hour telephone focus groups. This strategy was found well fitting for the individual interview of key informant interviews which were conducted by telephone.

Capturing and Preserving Data

I captured and preserved data for this inquiry mainly through video-recording, and also took notes as I made observations of focus groups, and other interactions that were important for the study. Making notes was however, the primary method of capturing and preserving data during the telephone interviews. The video-recording material became extremely helpful during the transcription and analytic processes, where I could simply refer to the video each time I needed to clarify an issue (e.g. *who* said *what*). Better still, the material from the video tape was transferred into a DVD for easier use during transcription, and at any time that I needed to triangulate sources of data.

The data was then transcribed, and saved on both my laptop computer and the USB flash drive in case the computer malfunctioned; back-up material would be

available. The DVD, USB flash drive, and the laptop were kept under lock and key in the researcher's study room to preserve confidentiality and protect participant's privacy.

The notes that I made as I visited the two villages as well as those taken during the focus group interviews came handy during analysis of data, and helped in triangulation of data. As proposed by Merriam (1998) as I made notes and observation of the all the processes during data collection, I was able to do initial analysis, and determine some emergent themes.

The study examined experiences of widows in Botswana regarding their involvement in the cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourned the deaths of their husbands. Furthermore, the investigation sought to portray what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows. A question that had direct implications for counseling was examined how knowledge and insights gained from the results of this investigation could to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

Description of Interview Questions

Protocol questions for both the focus group discussion and individual interviews are available in the Appendices section. The interview questions were outlined in a chronological sequence to address each stage of the funeral ceremony—that is from the time death is known until the cleansing ceremony. Complementary questions to the main question required participants to describe the effects of the cultural rituals, to list and describe those that were most helpful or not helpful at all. A question regarding counseling was also included, as well as making recommendations for both the counseling and the traditional approach of care to grieving widows. A concluding

question required participants to add anything, which may have not been covered in the discussion within the context of the investigation

Data Analysis

Identifying Meaning Units

Data gathered through both the focus group discussions and individual interviews were analyzed to produce findings. As Gorgi (1985) indicates, the process of data collection is not an end in itself. The culminating activities of a qualitative inquiry are analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. The focus of the analysis captured the units of meaning from the transcripts (Giorgi). Some transcripts were quoted verbatim while others were summarized into statements.

The four (4) major steps in describing the units of meaning postulated by Giorgi (1985) are now discussed; (a) the first step is getting the sense of the whole, by reading through the entire description, (b) the next step involved the discrimination of meaning units within a psychological perspective and focused on the phenomenon under inquiry. As I read through the transcripts, I coded themes as they emerged, which were later grouped together as meaning units. Giorgi (1985) reminds that since one cannot analyze the whole content simultaneously, it has to be broken down into manageable units. During analysis, the subject's language is not changed in any way hence some scripts were quoted verbatim.

Then third step © entailed transformation of subject's everyday expressions into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated; In Giorgi's words, the transformations presented above takes place basically through the process of reflection, and imaginative variation. The final step (d) is the synthesis of

transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological structure of the event—the last step in the analysis. I synthesized and integrated the insights contained in the transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological structure, regarding the experience of widows in relation to cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement.

In addition to the four major steps of data analysis presented by Giorgi (1985) above, the four fundamental existentials postulated by van Manen (1997) were applied also to complement the data analysis. These four existential fundamental are spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), temporality (lived time), and relationality (lived other). These categories are described by van Manen as belonging to the existential ground by way of which human beings experience the world, although not in the same modality.

According to van Manen (1997) the lived space or spatiality is felt space – which is more difficult to put into words, since the experience of lived space (as lived time, body) is largely pre-verbal and we do not ordinarily reflect on; yet we know that the space in which we find ourselves affects the way we feel (e. g. church, party, or funeral). Hence we experience different feelings in different spaces.

A number of widows spoke of the different spaces they occupied during the different stages of the funeral ceremony; from *lying-in* through to the end of the scheduled mourning period that culminates with the cleansing ceremony. Widows described these as spaces of loneliness, confusion, and disorientation, intrusive thoughts, and the excruciating pain of loss. As van Manen (1997) highlights, we may say that we

become the space we are in; in the framework of this investigation the widows were in the space of suffering and sorrowfulness.

Lived body or corporeality (van Manen, 1997) refers to the phenomenological fact that we are always bodily in the world. Some widows reported experiences of being “out of their body” and general diminished physical strength during the funeral ceremony of their husbands. Some indicated that they were disoriented throughout the funeral and after the burial.

Lived time, also known as temporality is the subjective time as opposed to clock time or objective time (van Manen, 1997). Of particular importance is the time that the widow awaits the arrival of the deceased’s body from the mortuary, for the night vigil. Lived time is described as that which appears to speed up when we enjoy ourselves or slow down when we feel bored (van Manen).

Within the existential framework, some widows expressed that their mourning period was too long. They wanted to be un-garbed to be part of the larger society. van Manen (1997) stresses further that whatever we have encountered in our past now sticks to us as memories or as forgotten experiences that somehow leave their traces on our being. Moreover, van Manen states that as we make something of ourselves, we may interpret who we once were or who we are now. Accordingly, as soon as they were garbed, widows declared that they were ready to accept their widowhood state. van Manen reminds us that the past changes itself because we live toward a future we already see taking shape or the shape of which we suspect as yet, a secret mystery of experiences that lie in store for us. A significant number of widows indicated that they were unsure of

their future life in the absence of their husbands, consequently feeling extreme fear and anxiety about the future and that of their children.

Lived other or relationality is the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them. As we meet the other we approach them in a corporeal way; through a handshake or by gaining an impression of the other in the way that he or she is physically present to us (van Manen, 1997). When garbed in mourning clothes, widows mentioned that they were approached with a different demeanor by their community, describing it as a sign of respect and empathy. In some tribes, a widow cannot even extend a handshake while garbed in mourning attire. The widow continues to be under strict surveillance by the community even though fully observing cultural norms. In a larger existential sense, human beings have searched in this experience of the other, the communal, the social, for a sense of purpose in life, and meaningfulness grounds for living, as in the religious experience of the absolute Other-God (van Manen, 1997).

In real life these four existentials of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relation, can be differentiated but cannot be separated. They all form an intricate unity of our life world (van Manen, 1997). Through the focus group discussions widows were able to describe their life world as they experienced it; bodily, and in terms of space and time, as well as relating to their community.

Limitations of the Study

In a qualitative study that uses a purposive sampling method to select participants, the major limitation is that the results of the study cannot be generalized to a larger population. Most of the study participants were rural dwellers with little influence from

the Western world; this may have limited the diversity of viewpoints regarding the utility of traditional structures. There is limited literature on matters relating to death, and cultural tradition in Botswana. As a result, insights were drawn from other countries in Africa, and other parts of the world.

There are very few studies also that have been conducted to date on the effectiveness of the counseling intervention in Botswana and most of Africa; inferences were drawn from other social and human fields, other than counseling and also from other parts of the world. Additionally, in a world where there were no limitations in terms of finance and time, follow-up interviews could have illuminated more insights and enriched the investigation findings further.

Summary of Chapter III

In this chapter I have explicated the qualitative research methods and ethnographic approach used in this study. The conceptual framework, which delineates the bioecological model and the symbolic interactionism, was discussed also. The conceptual framework focused on the interrelationships and interconnectedness of communities and how they, as a result, affect and are affected by one another.

The focus groups discussions, which were the primary methods for data collection, are discussed under the “methods and instrumentation” section. Included under this section also are key informant interviews and the researcher’s observation, as well as the section on the researcher as an instrument. In this section, I discussed factors that raised my interest to conduct an investigation of this nature and how my academic achievement and life experiences led me to conduct this study.

Sampling procedures were addressed; these took into account the ethical issues and the rights of subjects. The research design was addressed, the data collection procedure as well as the protocol questions. All the sampling procedures observed the protocol that was prescribed by the DU Institutional Review Board.

The analysis of the data was guided by the Giorgi's (1985) framework, and van Manen's (1997) existentials of lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived relationality. These existentials were well depicted in the widows' transcriptions during the focus group discussions. The limitations were also presented, and discussed some constraints I encountered while I was conducting the study.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

In this chapter I have discussed the findings of the investigation, examining the experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to their involvement in cultural rituals of death. Three focal questions that guided this study were: how do widows in Botswana experience the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourn the loss of their husbands? What aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows during mourning? How can knowledge and insights gained from the results of this study begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions?

In this section I have described the entire group process, summarized participant demographics for both Focus Groups and presented them in tables. The first focus group process was then discussed under the following sections; participant characteristics and group composition, solicitation of participants, the reasons for low attendance; the group relationships as well as the group process have been discussed. A sampling of questions that guided both focus group discussions is available in Appendix B. A similar layout was observed for the second focus group discussion. The emergent themes were discussed and summarized in tables at the end of each discussion. Themes were identical for the both focus groups, with slight variations for individual key informant interviews. Included in this chapter are findings from key informant interviews, which were also summarized in a table at the end of each individual interview discussion. A synthesis of all participants' transcripts was summarized into a table to ease understanding and ensure clarity of the results.

The Focus Group Process

Focus Group I and II meetings were lead by a principal facilitator, a counselor who holds a master's degree in counseling and is specially trained in running focus groups. The facilitator, she is of *Bakalanga* ethnicity, she spoke the same language as the participants, which ensure an easy communication process during group discussions. This arrangement was made to prevent my over-involvement with experiences of widowhood, which is an experience close to my heart (see section on Researcher as an Instrument in chapter III). Krueger (1998) recommends that teams of facilitators conduct groups, so that one person can focus on facilitating the group while the other takes detailed notes and deals with mechanics like tape recorders and cameras. Most importantly, a second team member can also take care of special needs that may arise, for example, someone needing to leave early or becoming overwrought (Krueger).

I also needed to observe the group process and members' dispositions as participants discussed their experiences of losing of their husbands and their involvement in the relevant cultural rituals and practices. As a result of this arrangement, I had enough time to make observations of the group process and take field notes which were helpful during the analysis of data. Time and again during the group discussion I would request for elaboration and clarification from participants as it became necessary.

The focus groups were guided by open-ended questions. These questions were outlined according to the bereavement stages observed in Botswana, with emphasis on the *Bakalanga* bereavement rituals. The bereavement stage processes begin immediately after the announcement of the husband's death, and culminate with the cleansing ceremony. The *Bakalanga* stage process is discussed in detail in chapter II.

Both focus group discussions were video-taped, which enabled me to identify with ease, each participant's comments during data analysis. As mentioned earlier, the language that was used throughout the discussions was *Ikalanga*, a local language with which the participants were most comfortable. I also speak this language fluently. Most of the participants had achieved only an elementary school level of education, hence it may have proved difficult for these participants to express themselves fluently in the English language.

Focus Group One

Participant Characteristics and Group Composition

This focus group consisted of five participants who provided very rich descriptions of their experiences with cultural rituals following their husbands' deaths. Although some researchers recommend that the size of a focus group is ideally about 8-12 people (e.g. Krueger, 1998; Merriam, 1998), Levers (2006) has offered a discussion regarding the need for smaller focus groups when dealing with complex topics such as that of the present study regarding widows' experiences of rituals associated with death. Berg and Krueger, cited in Levers (2006) recommend that the size of groups be smaller, suggesting no more than seven participants. Perhaps the issue of exact size is far less important than knowing when to use a larger group. The decision about size might then depend upon the nature of the information being sought, the type and number of questions being posed, and the composition of the group.

The five participants, ages 45-69 years old, had lost their husbands in the past five years prior to the investigation. The length of their mourning periods ranged from three to fourteen months. All participants were elementary school graduates and hailed from

Village A in the North East District of Botswana (As a way of ensuring confidentiality and clarity in presenting the study findings, this village is only referred to as Village A). This village is situated approximately 48 miles from the Botswana-Zimbabwe border, and is home to most people of the *Bakalanga* tribe, some *Ndebele* and a few of the *Batswana* tribes. Demographic characteristics of the first focus group are presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1

Focus Group-1 Characteristics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Education Level	Years Widowed	Mourning Period
Happy	56	Kalanga	Elementary	5	6 months
Botho	45	Ndebele	Elementary	3	6 months
Conty	55	Kalanga	Elementary	5	6 months
Confidante	56	Kalanga	Elementary	5	14 months
Cathy	63	Kalanga	Elementary	5	14 months

N. B. All the names used for participants are pseudo rather than real names.

Preliminary Visit and Participant Solicitation

I conducted preparatory visits to Village A to seek participants for focus group discussions and to introduce the concept of data collection to them. During this visit, I sought permission from the village chief to conduct the investigation, and requested for village elders to assist me in identifying potential participants.

The village chief suggested assembling a village *kgotla* (tribal court) meeting through which she would seemingly ‘coerce’ widows to participate in the study. I humbly turned

down this offer and assured her that I would be able to identify individuals who would participate voluntarily.

The chief identified a minister of Saint John the Baptist Church to assist me in identifying potential participants for the study. With the minister's help, I was able to locate and identify 15 widows whose participation I requested for focus group discussions. Out of this number, only six turned up for the focus group discussion on the scheduled day. Three of these widows were above the stipulated age for the study; however, I could not exclude them for fear of disappointing them and causing discord among village residents. The chief had promised to 'encourage' more widows to participate in the study and to arrange for us to use the village's Youth Center conference room for the focus group meeting. However, the chief did not undertake these activities as promised, rather on the day scheduled for the group discussion the chief left the village for a meeting in a nearby city.

The focus group discussion was held two weeks after the invitational meeting. A classroom was secured for the first group meeting in Village A elementary school. Realizing that I had a small number of group participants, lack of commitment, and general reluctance in this village, I made plans to solicit more participants in a different village (referred to as Village B). More participants would ensure diverse insights as well as enhance what Levers (2006) references as trustworthiness of investigation results. The solicitation of participants for the second focus group is discussed under the "Focus Group Two" section.

Low Attendance

The number of participants attending group discussions was significantly less than the number of widows who were initially identified in the village during preliminary visits. I was made to understand that most people in the village had gone either to cultivate their fields, since the rainy season had just begun, or to gather the *mophane* (caterpillar) worm, which was available only during this season. The *mophane* worm is a delicacy, a natural resource, and a source of revenue for some unemployed people in Botswana. Naturally people would prefer a money-generating endeavor over a non-paying meeting like the one I had planned for this village.

It is important to highlight that, since the advent of the HIV/AIDS “industry” in Botswana, study participants are usually compensated financially for their time and involvement; of particular reference are those studies conducted frequently by the Harvard/Botswana Partnerships who are the money giants in the country. Consequently, a study like mine, which did not provide monetary benefits, was not attractive to potential participants. Hence, lack of commitment was evident in Village A in spite of prior arrangement to participate.

Group Relationships

The first focus group consisted of five participants who appeared to relate very closely to each other. This closeness allowed for a nonjudgmental atmosphere and enhanced individuals’ honest disclosures. Conversely, Krueger (1998) proposes that focus group participants should preferably be total strangers with the possibility of never having to see each other again to ensure best discussion results. The focus group of five

participants was small and easy to handle, even though it did not meet the requirements of a focus group in terms of numbers postulated by Krueger (1998) and Merriam (1998).

The group process went well. However as would be expected of focus groups, there were participants who were more vocal than others, but we ensured a balance to the process by prompting, but not coercing, the participation of the quieter group members. All the participants were given pseudo names to protect their privacy as well as ensure confidentiality, which is difficult to guarantee in a group setting (Corey & Corey, 2005). The village was identified only as Village A and the village chief was not identified in order to further preserve participant confidentiality.

Setting the Mood for the Discussion

The first question that was posed to participants was intended to set a tone for the group discussion and not to enrich data for the study per se. In the culture of Botswana if one does not start conversation regarding death by paying attention to the *way the death occurred*, or *how the news was received*, that person is considered false and uncaring. Accordingly, this question was posed to capture the interest of participants and to convey an empathic and caring attitude. This kind of approach also prevented participants from going back and forth to share about the causes of their husbands' death. The question asked was, "how did you hear about your husband's death?" As soon as this question was posed, one widow's eyes (Botho) began welling-up and her cheeks overflowed with tears and she cried throughout the interview.

I asked her if she would rather discontinue the discussion, but she said, "I want to talk about my concerns. I have never had anybody talk so openly about this matter."

I acknowledged Botho's disposition by remarking, "I realize that you are hurting; this is a discussion, as mentioned earlier on, that will evoke painful memories of your husband's death. Nonetheless, I want to thank you for taking the risk to continue with the discussion."

Two group members responded to the question by indicating that their husbands drew their last breathe on their arms and they tended to preliminary last offices. These activities entail sealing of the eyes, closing the mouth, as well as aligning the body. Botho was one of them. The other three participants related that they were informed by the hospital staff where their husbands had been admitted for treatment and care. A common experience for all participants was that their husbands had been unwell for a considerable time before they succumbed to death. Generally speaking, Batswana are more accepting of the event of death if the deceased had been unwell for some time. The sudden or unexpected death is usually difficult to handle by most Batswana.

Emergent Themes

There were seven major themes that emerged from the first focus group discussion, the eighth theme consisted of recommendations that widows made to the policy makers. The themes were identical to those presented in the second focus group discussion. These themes were (a) the community gathered together and secured a place for *lying-in*, (b) *lying-in* was perceived as a rightful act exemplifying care and respect, (c) the *night vigil* was viewed as a time of intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but, with soothing reflections, (d) garbing was seen as maintaining spiritual connections with the deceased, (e) burial was described as time for realizing the truth (about death), (f) cleansing and "undressing" were perceived as removal of *senyama*, (g) counseling was an unknown

phenomenon, and (h) widows had recommendations for the policy makers in Botswana. These themes are now discussed in detail.

Theme I: The Community Gathered Together and Secured a Place for Lying-in

The initial question for the widows regarded the major activities that took place following the pronouncement of their husbands' death. The first to respond was Happy who said, with a somewhat flat affect, "As soon as my husband died, a community of elders came to support me and one of them immediately secured a space for me to lie down."

Cathy was next to contribute saying, "I then went home in the accompaniment of elders who, when reaching home, made a bed for me to lie down."

Conty also remarked, "I was then taken home by my elders and a floor bed was spread for me which I occupied immediately."

Confidante responded, "Once people heard of my husband's death, they began pouring into the compound. My sister-in-law, a younger woman, made a bed for me to lie down and I was later assigned an elderly widow as my caregiver." All participants reported that once the death of their husbands was known, a place for *lying-in* was identified by elders who also made their floor beds.

Botho was the only one who reported that she was supported by her brother-in-law's wife, a much younger married woman. With tears flowing uncontrollably, she commented, "My brother-in-law's wife made a bed for me. She was not widowed. She saw the need to stand in for me. My mother-in-law stood there with her arms folded not doing anything, even though she was a widow herself!"

Conty had a different experience, “My cousin prepared my floor bed. She then changed the usual way I had tied my head scarf to tie a knot under my chin (a sign of mourning). She was assigned as my caregiver for the duration of the *lying-in* period.”

Confidante added that her bed was spread by her sister-in-law, a younger woman, but as soon as elders started pouring into the compound, a certain Mma-Thuso, an elderly widow, was assigned to be her caregiver. Happy, who was content with her in-laws’ treatment throughout her mourning period, mentioned that her mother-in-law had made a floor bed for her, and her husband’s aunt was assigned to be her caregiver throughout the *lying-in* period.

Theme II: Lying-in was an Appropriate Act, Exemplifying Care, and Respect

Another question posed to participants was about their experience of the *lying-in* period. The first to respond was Confidante, who said with somber emphasis, “This is the most appropriate action to undertake at a time like this. Once you submit to lying down, then you know the reason why you are doing it; you affirm your loss. Otherwise you may just simply object; submitting means that you acknowledge the loss.

Botho, in a sob-broken voice, remarked, “It was the right thing to do for my beloved husband—the father of my children. We had a family together. I needed to be in a spiritual relationship with him now that he had died, the same way that I related to him in his lifetime. I needed to be in *one spirit* with him in his death.”

Happy, speaking in second person remarked, “Once your husband passes on, nothing should be in your way of *lying-in* for him because you still love him even though he is dead. You lie down to be in *one spirit* with him. Besides, one has to follow what our

elders always did in the past; when a husband died, the wife lay down on his behalf. Up till the time that you are garbed, you do it (*lying-in*) whole-heartedly.”

Conty, the last of the participants to add input said, “It was right for me; it is culture. Since time immemorial, whenever a husband died, his wife laid down in his honor...so did I.”

I sought for the meaning that the participants derived from having a (special) place arranged for them to lie down. The theme of showing “love and respect” emerged from all the participants. Conty said that making a bed for her to lie down “was a sign of respect to me.” She went on to say that a community of elders assembled and assigned someone to care for her and support her physically all the time she needed to get up. I asked what this meant to her. She promptly replied, “They cared about me.”

Happy, with her usual positive outlook, thoughtfully responded, “Respect- they respected me as a woman in pain. They treated me well; they did everything for me as I mourned my husband.” Cathy, who was also content about her in-laws’ treatment, stressed that her in-laws were supportive of her all the way until the burial; they respected her as their daughter in-law.

Botho, using one corner of her head scarf to wipe her tears, complained, “For me, my in-laws’ behavior indicated that they had no love and cared less for me; they neglected me. The woman who made a bed for me to lie down on respected and cared for me as a new widow, even though she was not widowed herself!”

Theme III: The Night Vigil Evoked Intense Pain, Intrusive Thoughts, but, with Soothing Reflections

The night vigil is preceded by the arrival of the deceased's body in the late afternoon of the day before burial. Once in the homestead, the deceased's body is laid adjacent to the widows' floor bed, until the following morning when it is taken away for burial.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of the night vigil. The night was perceived as affirming the occurrence of death. As Confidante indicated, "During the mourning period before the burial, you would be thinking that *maybe* he did not really die; *maybe* someone will come to tell me that he is alive. But the night vigil confirms beyond a doubt that he has died."

After drawing a deep sigh, Botho responded, "During the night vigil I was thinking of what my future will be like without my husband. I was in a good relationship with him; both my parents had died and I had no one close left for me. I kept asking myself who would fend for my children. I was also wondering who would help me cultivate my land now that I was a widow. These thoughts were overwhelming to me."

Confidante contributed, "This day brought me a lot of pain; I found that as people gave eulogies, hearing them speak on behalf of my husband - it really struck me that he had truly died. I felt intense pain, which I harbored throughout the burial ceremony and beyond. You really feel bottled up in pain. Back in the house from the gravesite, I was still hurting badly." Confidante was another participant who had episodes of breaking down, but not in any way comparable to Botho.

Cathy said that she was particularly thinking about her children, “What will happen to me and my children? For this reason I was able to hear and take in some messages from the sermons as well as words of wisdom, but some of it I could not! I was deeply immersed in thoughts of my deceased husband, my future and that of my children.”

Botho, who was still crying, mentioned that she was reflecting on the poor relationship she had witnessed from her uncaring in-laws, recounting that this attitude made her sink deeper into pain because she had led a relatively happy life with her husband.

Happy spoke at length about her experience of the night vigil, “It was really painful and hurting for me. One cannot escape the pain of loss. I suffered intense and excruciating pain. The speakers spoke on behalf of my departed better half, who I was lying next to and knowing very well that I will never see or talk to him again. I experienced immeasurable pain, which continued through the burial and beyond. Concerning the eulogies; oh, this is painful! You realize that they are talking about his life as he lies next to you in silence. It is (the night vigil) a way of comforting the widow, but the pain is unbearable.”

Cathy filled in by saying, “When the ministers of religion preached and talked on his behalf, I could hear some of their comforting words, but I missed out on a lot more, my mind focused on questions like where will I ever find my beloved husband?”

After most widows had commented, I interjected a question, “It sounds to me that the night vigil was fraught with so much pain and suffering, and countless thoughts going

through your minds; would you have rather not had the night vigil at all?" In a chorus, they all answered in the negative.

Botho, who had now calmed down momentarily, responded by saying that the night vigil was helpful for her; she had heard some powerful words from the sermons, even though these could not rid her of pain. She said, "The singing of religious hymns and preaching of sermons was soothing to me. The night vigil is a rightful and very necessary procedure to undertake. This is the time that the *devil* will be fighting with the Lord and the Lord is laboring to protect and comfort *you*! By the devil I am referring to the attitude and behavior of my mother-in-law," she explained.

Confidante continued from where Botho left off and remarked, "I absorbed the eulogies and sermons, as well as stories of my husband. However, the experience of death is a lifetime memory. The presence of community members and all their actions during the night vigil (sermons, singing, and giving eulogies,) were very soothing to me."

Conty, contentedly and with confidence, said, "The night vigil comforted me tremendously; I felt settled in my spirit. The eulogies and sermons were given to bid my husband farewell. I did not spend any time thinking about my future at all; I told myself that my husband is being handed over to his Father (God in heaven). I felt really comforted."

Theme IV: Garbing—Maintaining Spiritual Connection with the Deceased

Garbing is a special ceremony of dressing the widow in the mourning colors of black, navy blue or green. The choice of color depends on the family or widow's religious affiliation. For example, those who belong to the Independent African Movement Churches use a navy blue or green color and members of the Christian

Protestant Churches dress in black. Garbing is usually done in the early morning hours just before the burial ceremony. However, there were some participants who were garbed after the funeral; their situation is discussed in the next section.

Participants were asked how they experienced being garbed. Happy said that she was ready and willing to be garbed for her husband, and observed all the cultural prescriptions for bereavement that she needed to do for her husband. “I had the inner strength to be garbed for my husband because, just before he died, I had been so sick—to the point of death. Little did I know that when I got better he would die. So I had to be garbed in his honor for this reason (the value of life),” she explained.

Botho, who was still struggling with a lot of pain from lack of support from her elders, added, “I was garbed by my cousins the morning of the burial. According to my religion, we are not compelled to dress in mourning colors. Nevertheless, I deemed it rightful and proper to be garbed on behalf of my husband. I then made a personal commitment to dress in mourning clothes. My husband brought me from a long way to this community of people I did not know before. But now I needed to dress up to mourn his departure. The love that I gave to him (in life) he has taken it with him to the grave, and that which he gave to me remains in my heart.”

Similar to Botho’s situation, Confidante belonged also to the Zionist Christian Church (ZCC) responded, “I was not garbed for the funeral; our church does not put much emphasis on morbid colors. However after the burial, I decided that I needed to dress in mourning to be in relationship with my husband. The following day, I went to town to buy clothing material from which my mourning garb was made.”

Similar to Confidante and Botho's churches, Conty also belonged to a church that had relaxed rules concerning mourning garb. She said, "I put on a blue dress on the morning of the funeral. My church had no say over this. I found it proper to mourn my husband in this attire as well as it being a sign of widowhood, and a filial responsibility. I did my duty to the family and church equally; I heeded to what my husband had requested in his life time (to observe cultural tradition). I was garbed by my elders in the presence of my church representatives. I was encouraged to attend church regularly, and told that I should not feel discriminated against because of my mourning attire. I was strongly advised to be always in the presence of the Lord, since He may call me to His Kingdom at anytime and I may not be ready spiritually."

Cathy, an elderly widow who frequently responded after everybody else proudly said, "I was garbed the morning before we left for the graveyard. In my mind I was saying that I am being garbed for my husband...it is appropriate that I dress-up in this manner to honor him. I have been with him over a long time, and have raised a family with him. So, wherever he is, he should see that his wife truly loves him and he will say that he loves me too."

Theme V: The Burial—A Time for Realizing the Truth (About Death)

The facilitator asked questions about the burial experience, including the roles widows played at the ceremony. Confidante explained that she felt feather-like in weight when she was called out by elders to say her final goodbyes. "If nobody would have supported me as I *kicked-in* the portion of the earth into the grave, I would have fallen into the grave, I felt so powerless. This was the most hurtful part for me, compounded by the uncontrollable wailings of children around me. The pain of witnessing the burial was

overwhelming for me, although this proved that *everything* had ended. Although one feels hurt, it is not necessary to weep anymore. Even if you may not forget about the loss immediately or any time in the future, you come to accept it, and live with the pain forever.”

When it was her turn, Botho commented, “Yes, I was asked to stand up to *kick-in* the portion of earth into the grave. However when I stood up, it felt as though my knees had been fastened with screws. It was as if I was somebody else; I felt as though I could easily be blown away by the wind. Although I did what I was asked to do and had my eyes open, I could not comprehend anything cognitively. I cannot tell what I did; it was as if I was in a trance, even my mind was not fully functioning. Coming back from the graveyard, as I sat with the elderly ladies, I did not even know how to relate to them or what to say to them. I felt confused; my eyes were open, but I could not connect to the events that were going on. It seemed as though there was a dark cloud over me. As for the room that I used with my late husband, I became scared to enter it on my own; it did not look or feel the same anymore, and it was no longer like the place we shared each day together. It was so different and it took me some time to get used to it.”

Conty shared the same view with the other participants about loss of composure at the burial and said, “Yes, I was asked to *kick-in* a portion of soil into the grave. My elders helped me stand up and supported me, but I did not know who I was at that moment, I do not even remember which foot I used to *kick-in*, my elders can relate this better.”

Happy also recounted on the confusion she encountered at the burial, “At the gravesite I was asked by elders to bid farewell to my beloved. This is the time that I felt as if my mind has been displaced. This *kicking-in* of the soil into the grave is an

indication that this is the final moment of departure and you will never see him again. I said to myself, I am left alone to suffer with the children. Nonetheless I bid him farewell to his eternal home. All this time the elders supported me physically. I did all that I was asked to do and they took me back to my seat, but I was hurting profoundly. It is indeed very painful, but there is nothing else to do; just to say *this is it*-the end. Whenever I came back home from the graveyard, it felt as though the home was no longer mine. I was disoriented for days; the compound suddenly appeared too big for me to the extent that I did not remember where the daily household utensils were kept. I felt as if I was in a different body. Truly, things change!”

Cathy also related the ‘out of body’ feeling she encountered at the burial. “The elders removed the shoe from the foot that I was going to use to *kick-in* the portion of earth into the grave. I do not remember how I did it. I do not even remember the person who supported me throughout this activity and back to my seat. I remember I looked down at the floor of the grave, and seeing his coffin lying down there, I asked myself who will be there for me. As we left the cemetery it felt as though I would see him (husband) around the house and hear him talk to me. It is as if one is in a dream, it hurts. However you hurt—however you dream, there is nothing else to do; this is the reality.” All participants related similar and strange bodily experiences that they went through during the burial.

Theme VI: Cleansing and “Undressing”

At the end of a set mourning period the cleansing ceremony is undertaken. This ceremony involves the permanent removal of the widow’s mourning garb, and is commonly referred to as *go apolwa* (to be “undressed”). Removing the mourning garb, in

normal instances, is performed by the same elder who was the widow's caregiver during the *lying-in* period.

Focus group participants were asked about their experiences of *go apolwa* and the traditional treatment they undertook for cleansing. Botho tearfully expressed that she had not come to any terms of agreement with her elders up to the time of her cleansing ceremony. "I was cleansed by a younger person, even though my mother-in-law was present. My mother-in-law and I were in mourning garb together (for Botho's husband). Shrugging her shoulders, Botho remarked that her mother-in-law did her own cleansing. I had this young adult cleanse me, because there was no one to do it for me. I almost did it on my own. This attitude showed me that the relationship I had with my mother-in-law was not a healthy one, hence I was not given appropriate care by elders. The one with whom I had a good relationship—my husband had departed this world. This experience of being neglected took my mind back to the night vigil and the burial ceremony, during which I still was not supported by elders support. I remember I heard a lot of what was said in the sermons. God was protecting me, but the *devil* (her mother-in-law) had a stronghold on my life. I found that all the pain and suffering resurfaced on this day. I really would have found it comforting to have been cleansed by an elder, as is expected culturally. This would have shown me that there was love, care, and respect from my community. However their behavior showed me lack of love and care. It took me a long time to get over it. Cleansing is an important procedure, because it prevents death defilement, which would be "deadly" to my future partner (if God would grant me one) if unattended in the traditional manner."

Confidante expressed similar sentiments as Botho, “If my elders would have taken it upon themselves to cleanse me, I would have felt better and my pain of loss would have eased. If they neglect you like they did to me, the pain of loss never leaves you. Nobody bought me a new dress for the cleansing ceremony; I used one of my old dresses. The traditional beer was brewed; that I appreciated. However, the nature of the ceremony did not help ease my pain at all; I was still hurting,” she choked on her words. “When it came to retrieving the deceased’s clothing for sharing out to his relatives, it was as if he had just died; we all started crying again with the children. It was indeed difficult.”

Conty had a good relationship with her in-laws throughout her mourning, contentedly she said, “I was cleansed by the same elder who garbed me. However, on this day, my feelings and emotions got really mixed up. During my mourning period, when I had my mourning clothes on, occasionally I would look at myself and ask myself why I was dressed this way, because I sometimes imagined that I would *one* day see my husband again. Then I would remember that, oh, he passed away. This day confirmed his death. Generally speaking, my cleansing ceremony went well. I was pleased with every aspect of it.”

Happy passionately commented, “The cleansing day is a like another day of death. It reminds you of all the events surrounding his death and burial. You think about why you are being cleansed and sorrow comes flowing back to you; you are being cleansed from the taboos that you upheld in respect of your beloved, deceased husband. You experience pain which is similar in intensity to the pain you experienced on the day of his death and burial. Although you change from those tattered clothes, it hurts.” Her

demeanor changed to pleasantness as she shared, “I was cleansed by the same elder who garbed me; both my parents and my in-laws were present. The pain was immeasurable though; it was a difficult moment for me. I was garbed for the whole calendar year, so that when I changed from my mourning garb, my children could not readily recognize me. They would call out to me ‘*Mama*’ whilst I sat in their midst. Whenever I responded to their call, they would be embarrassed and tell me that they no longer recognized me in my new clothes. They got used to the dark-colored clothing; it takes time for one to get used to normal clothing after a lengthy period in dark colored clothing. Whenever I was looking for something to wear, my mind would be tuned to look for the dark color; it takes time for one to erase this color from their mind.”

Cathy, who had been content at the beginning of her mourning with the support and care rendered by her in-laws, had a different story to tell regarding her cleansing, “When it became clear to me that there was no elder who would be available for my cleansing, I sought a spiritual healer from my church to rid me of *senyama*. He gave me holy water to drink and some to cleanse myself with. Nonetheless, I was relieved of my mourning clothes by my mother-in-law. As I did not have that much support, and having been alone with young children, when I was relieved of my mourning garb it was badly tattered since the mourning period was long also (14 months). I remember I went about seeking for jobs in the village dressed up in those tatters so that I could feed my children. I now belong to this community and have accepted my position as a widow.”

The question that followed sought for participants’ perceptions about the nature of cultural rituals, particularly those that were helpful in adjusting to loss, and how those rituals were helpful to the widows. Participants gave general responses about culture,

saying they could not select any particular thing and emphasizing that observing cultural tradition is one of the best responses to a husband's death and should always be done. Confidante, who was still caught-up in her troubled relationship with her elders, responded, "If cultural protocol had been followed it would have been most soothing for my troubled soul, but because it was not followed accordingly it brought me more pain and hurt."

Conty added, "Culture is good; if I was not treated in the traditional way after losing my husband, I might have died soon after him."

Happy, who had an exceptionally smooth experience with her elders, said, "Culture is good and it is proper that it should be observed always. It is helpful in many ways."

Cathy also added, "Cultural tradition is good; it helped me to relax my troubled soul. It depicted aspects of love and respect from my elders through their support. The traditional treatment that is instituted after the husband dies is very important; it prevents some very serious conditions associated with death, which, once contracted, have no treatment."

Botho, who had the most troubled relationships with her in-laws, did appreciate the helpful aspect of culture and was even able to differentiate this aspect from the negligent behavior of her elders, "Even though my mother-in-law did not perform the entire cultural rites with me, I maintain that cultural tradition is good and an important part of the death ceremony, and should always be undertaken in a proper manner."

Participants were asked if there were components of cultural rituals that may have hindered their adjustment to loss. Botho and Confidante's contributions indicated that

they were more hurt by the poor relationships they had with their in-laws. The lack of support and participation of elders in the ritual performances negatively affected their grief process, possibly hindered their healing. Botho's crying throughout the group discussion bears testimony to a disturbed mourning process.

Theme VII: Counseling—an Unknown Phenomenon

Widows were asked if they had been to any counseling session, and if so, at what period during their mourning, the kind of issues that prompted them to go for counseling, and how they experienced the provision of this service. What came to light was that none of the participants had ever been to a counseling session. Additionally, they had only a vague idea of what a counseling session entailed. Participants indicated that they sought support and guidance from other widows and their religious institutions, and also found comfort from being with their children. As a result, the subsidiary questions regarding counseling were not addressed.

Widows discussed the support they received from family and community members. Happy mentioned that she was comforted by her in-laws, her children, and her friend Betty, who was also a widow. Conty said she had no one to counsel with her. Botho added that she also had Betty to talk to her, and that “she really talked sense into my head during the moments that I was feeling very low.”

Confidante said she “saw it coming” (the death of her husband) and was comforted by her religious group and her minister. Cathy said she drew comfort from being with her children, even though she did a lot of self-talk.

Theme VIII: Widows' Recommendations to Policy Makers

Towards the end of the discussion, participants were asked to make recommendations to the policy makers in Botswana concerning the need for counseling and traditional practices in the event of a husband's death. Participants were very vocal about keeping traditional culture alive and that it should be passed from one generation to the next. They also underscored the dangers of not following traditional rites and rituals after the death of a husband, suggesting that at worst one could even die if she does not observe traditional practices.

Recommendations Regarding Counseling

Counseling was perceived to be helpful and recommendations centered on this general observation. Conty said, "Counseling should be helpful given that, for me, this discussion alone has proved very helpful and useful to me today."

Confidante added, "Counseling is good; at least one can talk about their concerns to somebody. I remember how I used to talk to Happy (referring to a group member) when I really felt low in spirits."

Botho agreed, "Yes, counselors help comfort you; I found Betty's words most helpful when I felt depressed; what more of a professional counselor?"

Cathy said, "Yes, there must be grief counselors in place."

Happy agreed with Conty, "Counseling is helpful. Just today from this meeting, I feel really good. I anticipate that grief counseling would really do somebody grieving a lot of good, especially if they have other issues that compound their grief."

Recommendations Regarding Cultural Tradition

Participants were all of the same opinion when asked what recommendations they would make to the policy makers in Botswana regarding the utilization of indigenous cultural rituals in the face of a husband's death. While Cathy focused on extending knowledge of traditional culture to one's children, Confidante recommended that cultural tradition be included in the national policy and Botswana Television (BTV) broadcasting media. Happy thought that guidance on appropriate mourning behavior, in line with cultural expectations, should be provided to young widows. Conty agreed with Confidante that cultural tradition was an important element for the Botswana government to emphasize, especially to younger generations. Botho linked the increased occurrence of death at an early age in Botswana to ignoring cultural traditions. "Cultural tradition should not be allowed to die. Look at our lives today and the lives of our elders in the past; too many young people are dying too early in their lives—a thing that was not known in the past. This is because we lost our roots. Cultural tradition is an important part of our life, in death or in life generally."

Towards the end of the meeting, time was given for those who might have wanted to add something that might have not been addressed in the discussion. There were no more comments from the participants. I thanked the participant for making my research project a success. When participants left the room, they were talking very pleasantly to each other, particularly Botho who had spent most part of the discussion crying. She had now calmed down and appeared to be relieved of most of her stressors, as were all other participants.

A summary of Focus Group 1 themes is presented in table 2 below. A summary of recommendations to policy makers by focus group one members is presents in table 3.

TABLE 2

Summary of Themes from Focus Group 1

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering together and securing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly Support and care Love and respect
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i> : An appropriate act	Care and respect A sign of mourning Spiritual connection Cultural tradition Community expectation Preliminary treatment
Theme III	The night vigil	Intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but, with soothing reflections, Confirms death In communion with the Lord Community support
Theme IV	Garbing	Spiritual connection with deceased Love, respect, and honor to deceased Sign of widowhood Acceptance of loss
Theme V	The burial	Time to realize the truth about death Intense pain, but acceptance of loss Strange bodily experiences Confusion and disorientation
Theme VI	Cleansing and “undressing”	Arena for the elderly Remove <i>senyama</i> Renews pain of loss Prevents lethal ailments Community expectation Confirms widowhood
Theme VII	Counseling	An unknown phenomenon

TABLE 3

Recommendations to Policy Makers: Focus Group 1

Theme VIII	Widow's recommendations to policy makers	Keep tradition alive Pass tradition to children Prevent lethal ailments Government reinforce tradition Use media to disseminate tradition
------------	--	---

*Focus Group Two**Participant Characteristics and Composition*

Focus Group II consisted of 12 members who were aged 34-68 years. They all had attended school; a significant number went up to elementary level, while some had spent part of, but not all, the required years in high school, and only one had a higher education level diploma. All participants in Focus Group II hailed from Village B in the Central district of Botswana. This village is situated about five miles from the Botswana-Zimbabwe border and is politically located in the Central district in the country. Village B is situated more than two hundred miles from Village A, and is home to people who are mostly of the *Bakalanga* ethnicity, some of the *Ndebele* and a few of the *Batswana* tribes. Group two characteristics are presented in table 4 below.

TABLE 4

Focus Group II-Characteristics

Name	Age	Ethnicity	Education Level	Years Widowed	Mourning Period
Peggy	34	Kalanga	Elementary	4	6 months
Brown	40	Kalanga	High School	3	6 months
Mogodi	68	Kalanga	Elementary	5	12 months
Chedu	48	Kalanga	High School	5	12 months
Mabaka	65	Kalanga	Elementary	2	8 months
Reba	59	Kalanga	Elementary	4	6 months
Tebamo	37	Kalanga	High School	3	6 months
Botlhale	40	Kalanga	Elementary	5	10 months
Letty	52	Kalanga	Elementary	5	6 months
Koki	45	Kalanga	Diploma	5	3 months
Sarah	46	Kalanga	Elementary	4	12 months
Ludo	35	Kalanga	High School	3	3 months

Preliminary Visit to Village B and Participant Solicitation

Following my telephone request for potential participants, widows were identified and assembled for the invitational meeting by the chairperson of the Home Based Care Center (HBCC) with the help of field officers and support from the village chief.

Following my request, the HBCC staff in this Village identified those widows who had lost their husbands in the five years prior to the study, and had undergone all stages of cultural rites according to traditional standards in the country, and were between the ages of 25-55 years. However, when I came for the introductory meeting there three widows who were above the stipulated age range.

Similar to Focus Group I, I could not exclude the older widows from the meeting, mainly because village networks are closely-knit; if an elderly person is disappointed, the rest may decide to avoid the meeting as a show of community solidarity. In fear of jeopardizing the research process, I allowed them to be part of the discussion. It turned out that they provided very insightful comments during the focus group discussion.

During the invitational meeting the chief of the village came to welcome us and expressed strong sentiments regarding the importance of discussing traditional culture. I extended a letter of request to conduct the investigation in the village, which he readily permitted. The chief left soon after the prayer meeting. Out of fifteen potential participants that attended the preliminary invitational meeting, twelve of them showed up for the focus group discussion on the scheduled day. Similar to Village A, the three who were not able to attend the focus group discussion had either gone to gather the *mophane* worm or to cultivate their fields.

The meeting for the second focus group was scheduled two weeks following the preliminary invitational meeting. The venue for the meeting was well arranged in the Home Based Care Center (HBCC) conference room. The meeting was conducted in the local language, which is *Ikalanga*. Preparations made in Village B, were more orderly, with more cooperation and willingness to help us put together resources for the meeting by the Home Based Care Center (HBCC) staff and the village chief.

Group Relationships

The discussion for Focus Group II was scheduled five days after the first focus group discussion. There were some limitations that I identified in this group that are worth noting, because they may have affected the group process. First, during the

discussion cell phones kept ringing, despite having pleaded with group members to silence their phones for one hour *only*. The movements that participants made to answer the phones did not only cause unbearable noises from screeching chairs, but also disturbed the flow of the conversation. Second, some staff members from the HBCC repeatedly came in and out of the conference room and each time they did, the person speaking would pause; this also fragmented the flow of the discussion. The staff of the HBCC had indicated interest in observing the discussion, but for the sake of confidentiality and privacy, they were denied this privilege.

Third, it appeared that everybody in the group knew one another, but were not necessarily friendly toward each other. For example there was a woman who, whenever she shared her experiences, a number of other women would make some unacceptable remarks. However on her part she would just ignore these remarks and continue with her story. This behavior of group members might have kept participants from disclosing honestly and expressing themselves freely, and may have affected the level of trust among the group members. There was also a group member who had a very incoherent hoarse voice; all efforts were made to listen and grasp what she was saying, but it became more and more difficult to understand what she wanted to share as her voice became fainter with each contribution. For the sake of peace, we let her stay on till the end of the discussion, but her comments did not benefit this part of the investigation.

The group members were slow to respond to questions, but soon became relaxed and answered all questions well. There were those members of the group who were more vocal than others, but we ensured a balance of input from all participants by gently asking the quieter participants for comments. Despite all the disturbances and impediments, the

group members responded well to all the questions and highlighted important insights about their experiences regarding their involvement in cultural rituals following their husbands' deaths. Unlike the first group, there was not one widow who openly showed her emotions throughout the discussion. Although some participants mentioned during the discussion that they were hurting, none of them shed a tear, pointing to the possible low level of trust in the group.

Setting the Mood for the Discussion

Similar to the first focus group, the first question posed inquired how each member heard of their husband's death. Participants mentioned the different circumstances under which they received the news of the death. As stated earlier, this question is important to set the tone for the discussion, to introduce the subject, and to convey a caring attitude toward participants. Participants mentioned different ways in which their husbands died.

Emergent Themes

Seven major themes emerged from this groups that correspond to those of the first focus group, and are summarized in Table 5 at the end of this section. The eighth theme consisted of recommendations to the policy makers regarding the utility of traditional culture following the death of a husband. These recommendations are summarized in table 6 at the end of this section also. No new themes emerged from this group, but the second group placed more emphasis on certain subjects as compared to the first focus group. For example, members of the first focus group discussed at length the *lying-in* period, whereas the second focus group elaborated on descriptions of the cleansing ceremony and its processes.

The themes were: (a) the community gathered together and secured a place for *lying-in*, (b) *lying-in* was perceived as a time of intense thinking, exemplifying care and respect, (c) the night vigil was viewed as a time of intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but, with soothing reflections, (d) garbing was seen as maintaining spiritual connection with the deceased, (e) the burial was viewed as a time for realizing the truth (about death), (f) cleansing and “undressing” removed *senyama* (h) counseling was an unknown phenomenon, and (i) widows had recommendations for the policy makers in the country. These themes, as they emerged in Focus Group II, are discussed in detail in the following section.

Theme I: Community Gathering Together and Securing a Place for Lying-in

The question posed to participants was regarding major activities that took place immediately following the pronouncement of their husbands’ death. The first to recount her experience of *lying-in* was a younger widow, Ludo, in her early thirties. She said, “My mother-in-law made a floor bed for me, which I occupied immediately. I was then given some herbal mixture to take orally. I was strongly advised also to sit up whenever I felt like crying, otherwise I would become deaf. I was to maintain this behavior until the burial was over. I was also given *lungudze* (a herb with a shell harboring a cotton wool-like substance) to block my ears with, so that I did not hear people crying outside the house before I received appropriate treatment. At the same time I could hear people’s murmurs outside the house which indicated that the community was slowly gathering-in.”

Sarah commented in a very incomprehensible and hoarse voice, “I had somebody make a floor bed for me, and the same person took care of me throughout the *lying-in*

period. (It became more and more difficult to understand what Sarah intended to say, so much that her contribution could not benefit the group any longer).

Mogodi, an elderly widow in her late sixties, followed next, “I am the second wife in a polygamous marriage of three. The elderly women made floor beds for the three of us to lie on side by side and we observed all the cultural taboos.

Koki is a registered nurse who presented a new twist regarding her experience of *lying-in* and spoke very lightly about the procedure as compared to other participants who spoke with deep conviction regarding *lying-in*. Shrugging her shoulders, she commented, “There was nothing much that was done for me in the traditional realm; my mother just brought a mattress for me, spread blankets and asked me to rest on it. My mother did not mind whether I lay down or sat up on the mattress. My relatives were among the first to gather in the compound and many other mourners kept coming in.” When Koki made this comment, the women’s heads slowly turned to look at her with wonder and shock.

Mabaka, an elderly widow in her late fifties, spoke slowly with intense passion and sincerity about her experience of *lying-in*, “As soon as my husband died (at home), they (relatives and neighboring community) took him to the mortuary. My grandmother, who was alive then, immediately made a floor bed for me to lie down. I was strongly advised to lie on my abdomen until the day of burial and to sit up whenever I felt like crying or when I had to eat something. I was supported by an elderly widow throughout, and whenever I visited the toilet my whole body was covered in a blanket.”

Botlhale, another younger widow in her late thirties, shared that somebody chewed and spat a paste of melon seeds into her ears to prevent deafness, and also had a goat slaughtered specifically so that the liver could be cooked and mixed with some herbs

that she took orally as an initial purification treatment. Botlhale's mother-in-law made a floor bed for her to lie on. The most prominent similarities among the widows' experiences were the gathering of the community, making a floor bed for the widow and the performance of the preliminary and preventive rituals.

Theme II: Lying-in: An Appropriate Act, Exemplifying Care and Respect

Initially, the participants had described *lying-in* as a time for intense pain and intrusive thoughts, but when Koki expressed that *lying-in* was depressing for her, the aspect of "intense thinking" was immediately switched to that of "respect and love." This is the reason that this theme is discussed under two subsections; "a time to think" and "respect and love."

A Time to Think

Questioning the widows' feelings revealed that lying down was time to think and, consequently, experience profound psychological pain. Reba, an elderly widow, remarked that she felt "very troubled, because my husband left me with very young children, even now I am still hurting, I am not even able to handle this discussion very well emotionally." I acknowledge her feelings and reminded her that she need not say anything, or could even discontinue the discussion if it became too difficult for her. However she opted to stay on and commented in a limited but very insightful manner.

Mabaka thoughtfully contributed, "I was also very perturbed as I lay down and, even now, I still hurt—as you can see from the way I speak ... because I had young children to take care of and one of them is blind and I just did not know what I was going to do with her on my own. However, I had to be strong and tell myself that I would fend for them and do whatever the Lord guided me to do."

Mogodi, the most senior member of the group, mentioned also that she was very sore and found it most difficult to imagine what her future would be like without her husband. She remarked, “I was comforted by the word of God, but this pain stays in you forever. I imagined those who have their husbands, how they will share their concerns with them and I will have no one to talk to about my distress.”

Letty, a younger widow lamented too, “I was thinking; young as I am, what will I do without a husband, what will I do with the children!”

Koki brought up a completely different nuance once again, “*Lying-in* for me was very depressing; as compared to the time I spent doing some activities with my sisters and cousin outside the house. Each time somebody came to pay me condolences as I lay down, they would re-awaken the pain in me by repeating the same message and then everything else concerning death became fresh in my mind. Lying down was causing me to feel really depressed!” A good number of participants once again slowly turned their heads towards Koki in some kind of subtle but grave astonishment, as she related her different viewpoint.

Respect and Care

A shift occurred as participants began to talk about the respect and honor they needed to pay their deceased husbands, and acknowledged the care and support they received from the elders as they lay down. Tebamo, another of the younger widows, spoke in a slow but emphatic voice, “For me *lying-in* meant respect for my husband. It also helped me in that, when friends visited me, I got some temporary relief from grief as they chatted with me. Besides, I did not have the strength to do anything; lying down was

the best thing for me to do at that moment. Most importantly, I had to honor my deceased husband.”

Chedu, who had not said a word for some considerable time and had been supporting her cheek (a sign of sorrow), stated that a widowed woman must lie down for her husband. “If I am seen to be up and about outside the house during such a time, it would seem like the relationship between my husband and I had been a fake one. It was important for me to show respect to the man that I would never see again by lying down, as a sign of respect and honor. *Lying-in* means also that I am a woman in mourning.”

Mabaka presented her story passionately and convincingly, “Lying down is very, very important. Imagine—*he is now asleep, there is no breathe in him, he is a lump of flesh*. I needed just to lie down to respect that he was gone, and for the community to acknowledge and endorse that I was in mourning! I did not even have the strength to move about; it was best for me to lie down and respect my fallen husband.”

In agreement with Mabaka, Mogodi reminded the group, “It is culture; this is what our elders did. Any widow in mourning cannot be seen walking about her usual business—it would be alarming to the community.”

Another elder, Reba, who had gone quiet after indicating that she was hurting, was stirred to respond after Koki’s remark concerning her experience, “*Lying-in* is tremendous respect for the widow and her husband; the widow is...I do not know what to say...*ngupe* (a girl receiving her menarche). One is not supposed to be seen in public. I could say you become too self-conscious to face the community; it is as if you are embarrassed. It is unthinkable that the woman cannot lie down when her husband has just died.”

Ludo agreed with the other speakers and remarked, “One has no strength at all after hearing the news of death. As for me, I became weak the day I heard of his death. I was supported all the time if I had to take a short walk around the compound.” Brown also humbly stated that it was helpful for her to lie down.

Peggy added that it conveyed huge respect for the man she had shared a life with, “I cannot even imagine how the community would view me if I had not laid down for my husband.” (This was the second time in this discussion that community expectation regarding *lying-in* was cited).

Bothale, in support of Peggy’s contribution, imagined questions that community members might ask each other, “Is she not the one who lost a husband? Is she the one? Why is she up and about? Lying down is but one sign of widowhood.”

These issues, as noted earlier, echo the discussion of the first focus group. Koki was the only one of a different view on this subject; she emphasized that *lying-in* made her feel more depressed.

Theme III: The Night Vigil Evoked Intense Pain, Intrusive Thoughts, but, with Soothing Reflections

A theme that was universal to all participants was that the night vigil brought them insurmountable pain. Most of those who commented related that, as much as it (night vigil) was intended to lead them towards healing, the pain they harbored was too deep for them to be brought to the level of immediate awareness. Similar experiences were expressed by members of Focus Group I.

The facilitator asked group members how they experienced the night vigil. Koki commented first, “This was the day I was expected to lie down much more intensely than

ever before. I did not get up or eat anything that day until I was advised by the elders. It was a very sorrowful day for me, especially when the body of the deceased arrived; the pain I felt was beyond any measure. I felt as though my heart and head were expanding in size.”

Mogodi immediately agreed with Koki, but went further to explain more about this day, “On this day I did not eat anything or drink any water. I lay flat on my abdomen and did not change position until the grave diggers came back and brought word that the grave had been dug. I was then advised to eat and change position whenever I felt like it.”

Mabaka, another elder, added slowly in her usual low but emphatic tone, “This is the day that his body is brought home. I was taken by some older widowed ladies to *palila*. When I came back I lay down. I did not change this position. I drank no water nor ate any food. The fasting and lying down continuously on my abdomen was done so that his *house* (grave) would be softer to dig.”

Chedu, who had been quiet for some time and cuddled in her shoulder scarf, contributed to the discussion, “The people who were assembled outside the house were intending to comfort me (inside the house). I remember that I heard and interjected some comforting messages which made me feel strong; other messages brought more sorrow. Actually, regarding my pain, (raising her voice and sitting up) the sermons did not help me. They could not reach the depth of my pain; they did not help me to settle at all, even though I heard what was being said. I stayed bottled up in pain until the burial was over and beyond this stage.”

Bothhale commented in a soft and humble voice, “This day brought me a lot of pain and suffering. I became very sad to think that this was the last day with my husband.

I could hardly absorb what was said in the sermons and eulogies. I kept asking myself what will happen to me tomorrow when all these people leave. I sank into the depths of pain. When looking at the mourners gathered, I knew that this assembly marked the end: I will never see my husband again, and I became *very sad, very sad.*”

Tebamo added, “I did not feel well at all beginning on that Thursday before the burial. I do remember being accompanied to *palila*, but I do not remember a minute of it. I do not even know how I did it. It was as if I was ‘outside of my body.’ Even the sermons; I tell you, I did not hear much of what was said.”

Letty also added that she did not remember much about the arrival of the deceased’s body. She described her cognition as if being in a daze, and it only became clear to her what was actually happening when she heard the singing of some funeral dirges, which she said sounded very soothing to her broken heart.

Mogodi emphatically and slowly said, “This is a day of pain. I remember the Friday before the burial; as the body arrived I asked myself what would happen to me tomorrow, who would be here with me? My concerns centered on questions regarding my future without him. I was very saddened and most perturbed.”

Peggy, who had given birth to her baby three days before the burial said, “When the body arrived on Friday, I was very hurt and disturbed. I could not attend the funeral since I had just had a baby. (In the culture of Botswana a new mother lies in confinement for her baby up to six weeks post-partum). That night I hardly got sleep; I had the most troubled night with great pain. I only went to pay my last respects to him at the graveyard a day after the burial.”

Mabaka spoke passionately, “My dear people of God, this is the day of reality; *a big day of humongous pain*. My focus was on his death, and wondering about the future. As the sermons were preached, mine was only to think of a time beyond here and I found it hard to relate to the activities of the night vigil.”

Most of the participants related the intense pain and the ‘out-of-body’ experiences they went through, especially when the body of the deceased arrived. They reported harboring this pain and confusion throughout the night and beyond the burial. Similar sentiments regarding the night vigil were expressed by members of the first focus group.

After most of the participants had contributed I explored their opinions on the necessity of the night vigil, as I had with the first focus group. “I hear most of you saying that during the night vigil you were too absorbed in numerous thoughts and reflections, and consequently did not hear much of, or connect to, what was happening. Is it necessary to have a night vigil at all?” As in the first group, a significant number of participants simultaneously agreed on its necessity and importance.

Botlhale took it further, “It is important that we spend the night with him, bidding him farewell for the last time. I experienced extreme emotional pain as I looked to the end. However, the community came to ‘hold hands’ with me for the very last time.”

Mogodi added, “The night vigil is an important undertaking; it may not reduce your pain but is it vital to have. You cannot have people just deposit the body with you and go away, leaving you alone—that would kill you! The community did the right thing to come and sit with me overnight to give me emotional support.” These remarks depict the group’s view of the importance of undertaking the night vigil.

Theme IV: Garbing—Maintaining Spiritual Connection with the Deceased

As discussed earlier, garbing entails dressing the new widow in dark mourning colors by an elderly previously widowed woman in the early morning hours of the day of burial. The focus group participants were asked how they experienced being dressed in mourning clothes. The most prominent theme that emerged in response to this question was that dressing in mourning garb kept the widows in spiritual connection with their deceased husbands. A number of ideas expressed in the first focus group were echoed in this group as well.

Chedu, a member of the ZCC, said, “I used the *only* dress that I had when he died. This dress was washed at night only. I was not specifically garbed in dark colored-clothing because I attended the same church with my husband and he had expressed that I should not be garbed in morbid colors if he died. I obeyed his word even when he was no longer there. I observed all the rules that elders advised me about. I did all this in honor of my husband. When we left for the graveyard, I began to hurt badly; I knew that all those actions were signaling the end.”

Mogodi shared her elder wisdom once again, saying that it was very useful to be garbed in gloomy colors, “They differentiated me as a widow from the rest of the community. I was dressed like a baby, and then my head scarf was secured under my chin. Nobody is supposed to dress themselves in this garb. As I put on this dress, I could feel my “soul melting.” However, I did what my husband had always wished for in his lifetime, and I did it (dress in mourning attire) as a way of honoring and remembering him.”

Tebamo commented, “It is important to be dressed in dark colors; my friends would not play or joke around with me as they used to. If I were not dressed in these distinctive colors, my friends may not have heard of the death and may behave towards me like they would each day, whilst I am feeling very low and hurting in spirit. Conversely, when they see me from a distance, the kind of dress I have on says it all, and they will be more sympathetic toward me than they had been at other times. This (black) dress communicates the death of your husband instantly.”

In agreement with Tebamo, Botlhale added that the mourning garb signaled widowhood, “It is culture also; it commands respect from the public. For example, if a widowed woman came in here (to the conference room) and was dressed in black, our demeanor would change immediately, because we would know that “all is not well with her.” This black dress completely humbled me to the point that I appeared like I was out of my mind.”

Mogodi interjected, “This attire made me feel weak and unsure of how to face the public. I felt intimidated in some way whenever I was in public.”

Reba, who had been quiet for a long time, commented, “After being garbed, I was told not to apply any ointment to my skin; my skin was not supposed to glow. Even if my skin appeared dry and cracked it was all right because I was mourning my husband—nothing else mattered.”

Mabaka also stressed what Reba had said, “I was garbed in a blue dress in the morning and also told about not applying ointment on my skin. I did not mind this at all; I only had to do this for my husband. When garbed in mourning clothes, you are in

mourning, so you avoid saying nasty words to people and you cannot be engaged in fights or arguments whatsoever at any time.”

Theme V: The burial—A Time to Realize the Truth (about death)

Most of the participants described the burial ceremony as time to face up to the harsh truth about death and to come to terms with loss. Participants also mentioned that the burial was the time that everything concerning their husbands’ passing away became real in their minds, and thus they experienced overwhelming pain. The pain was described as being compounded by uncontrollable screams from the children at burial.

Participants were asked about their experiences of the burial ceremony. Koki was the first to respond. With exceptional emphasis she said, “The burial ceremony was the most painful part; it was as if my husband has just died. It was a very painful day indeed for me. I was asked to *kick-in* the portion of earth. I was not told why I had to do it that way instead of just using my hand. The children then came after me and threw in their portion of earth as well, but these children screamed so loud I also lost control of myself. This was a difficult and sorrowful day for me. I felt as if my heart and head were swelling up.”

Mogodi shared, “As I *kicked-in* the portion of earth I felt weak—I felt like I would fall into the grave, especially as I saw his coffin lying down...down there! It was one of the most hurtful and disturbing sights for me.”

Mabaka commented with passion, “I was the first to be called by elders to *kick-in* the portion of earth. I had my body covered up in a blanket, after which I was unveiled. I had nothing else to do ... it was the end.”

Tebamo calmly contributed, “This was a very difficult time for me. Remember I got mixed-up emotionally on a Thursday before the burial and I was not any better this day. After saying my final words to the deceased and *kicking-in* the portion of soil, I could hear the uncontrolled screams and wailings of my children. I really wanted to hold them to comfort them, but I had no strength to do this...I felt guilty and helpless.”

A common theme that surfaced was that the participants came to accept the death of their husbands despite the excruciating pain they encountered at the burial. All the participants mentioned the *kicking-in* of soil into the grave as a cultural act of bidding farewell to the deceased. This theme was discussed in the first focus group as well. A key informant, Mama-T, explained that this is the traditional way of saying the final goodbyes to one’s husband (The interview with Mama-T follows this section).

Theme VI: Cleansing and “Undressing”—Getting Rid of Senyama

Cleansing is a ceremony that is undertaken after the scheduled mourning period is over. The widow is given special herbal or holy baths and some oral treatment to take as well. The widow is then “undressed” from the mourning attire and puts on a brand new set of clothes. The house or room that was “closed” is treated and officially “opened” and lit by the traditional or spiritual healer. All these actions are undertaken to get rid of *senyama* as well as *boswagadi*, which is believed to be lethal to the widow and her community, especially prospective sexual partners.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of being cleansed. The group focused on procedures that followed during the cleansing period, which widows related elaborately with a somber mood. In no other discussion did participants give such a detailed account of events concerning the death of their husbands.

All participants who contributed to this part of the discussion related that traditional beer was brewed and later spilled on the ground while the house was ‘opened’ and ‘lit.’ They shared that they were ‘undressed’ from the dark colored mourning clothes and dressed in new attire. These detailed descriptions of the cleansing ceremony occurred in the first focus group as well, but much more intensely in the second focus group.

In a somber mood, Mabaka was the first to respond to the question regarding cleansing, “It was eight months following the death of my husband when the elders came two days before the set date to brew traditional beer, which was to be used in this ceremony. When the traditional brew had fermented (two days after the preparation), it was held in a clay pot by the side of the gate. I fetched it and spilled it around the pot as advised, and the elders followed suit until everybody had had their turn. My church minister read some biblical verses and sprinkled holy water in the yard, “opened” the “closed house” and sprinkled it with holy water as well. To “open” it officially and cleanse it, some candles were lit. I entered the house with the elders, who proceeded to cut off blue colored pieces of mourning cloth from around my relatives’ necks. I then went away with an elderly widow to be “undressed” from my blue attire. I was dressed in new clothes from head to toe. The old mourning dress was supposed to be taken over by my mother, but she said it was no longer done that way nowadays, so the dress was given to an elderly relative to bury it.”

Chedu said her elders did not “close” the house after the funeral. Instead the deceased’s clothes were locked up in the wardrobe. She was helped to remove the only dress she used throughout the mourning period, which was not dark-colored. According to her religion (ZCC) she had an option of not dressing in morbid colors. Chedu also

described a lengthy procedure of cleansing that was identical to Mabaka's description of her cleansing ceremony.

Tebamo, a younger widow, mentioned that she was treated traditionally for three weeks in the 'closed house' following her husband's burial. The house was then was locked-up until the cleansing ceremony, when it was "opened" and "lit." Tebamo stressed that even though her cleansing was religiously oriented (similar to Mabaka and Chedu), after all the religious rites had been completed she underwent the traditional ritual of *lashisiwa* (literally meaning to throw away). Moreover, Tebamo emphasized that the traditional way, which was always done in the past, should be maintained. Time and again participants would emphasize that a certain act was "cultural tradition" or was "always done that way."

I asked the widows how it felt to them to be cleansed and rid of the mourning garb. The widows' response was that while they re-owned liberty, as well as getting their personal business together (which had stalled during mourning), they would always be widows. Specifically, one widow mentioned that she had no more interests in intimate relationships; she viewed them as mockeries following her husband's death. Koki laughingly remarked that widowhood took a lifetime.

Bothale said, "It only means that you are now allowed to pursue your personal business and that the scheduled mourning period is over, but you will always be a widow."

Chedu agreed, "Even when a man pursues you for intimate relationships, it feels as though they are mocking you."

The focus group then turned to discussing whether there were specific cultural practices and rituals that were helpful or not helpful during mourning. Reba, who had been quiet for some considerable time, responded, “Nothing was helpful; people came to comfort me, but I could not be comforted because my soul was hurting. I remained in pain despite what people did for me. I had other concerns to think about.”

Botlhale was a younger widow who experienced some disharmony and struggle over her husband’s estate with her in-laws and as a result they did not complete all the mourning rites with her. “They did not care what happened to me afterwards—even if I had died soon afterwards.” She had to leave her marital home prematurely to go back to her parent’s home. She too stressed that nothing was helpful. “People can never get you to the emotional state you were in before your husband died.”

I asked, “Am I hearing you (the group) say that you might as well do without the cultural rituals?” As if in a chorus, the participants said, “No, it would be dangerous.”

Koki restricted her response to the night vigil, a fraction of the cultural rituals, “The preaching and singing of funeral dirges during the night vigil were soothing to me. Some of the advice I heard during the night vigil became useful for me at a later stage in my mourning. Sometime after my husband died, my son became an alcoholic. I related to some advice I had heard during the night vigil and comforted myself with the thought that this might be the way he is dealing with the loss. This was the helpful to me.” Koki stood out with differing views regarding some traditional practices, this could be the reason she focused her discussion only to the night vigil.

I focused, the question “What would you say was helpful in the cultural rituals?” Chedu said that the harmonious relationship with her elders was most helpful. There was

no witch-hunting (as is usually the case, when in-laws blame the wife for being responsible for her husband's death). She enjoyed tremendous support from the elders; although they left for their homes after the burial (as culturally expected), they came back frequently to find out how she was getting along and how the children were coping with the loss. "Even though sometimes I suffered the pain of loss, their support kept me going, for this reason I endured less pain."

Mabaka concurred, "What was helpful for me also was that my elders supported me from the beginning to the end. Just performing all the rites with me from the time he died till the cleansing day was great support. Up to today my in-laws are still supportive to me with whatever concerns I share with them. I feel this is the most *tangible* part of cultural tradition...the support."

Mogodi also thoughtfully reminded the group of the supportive and helpful aspect of the cultural tradition, "Imagine the elderly folk running up and down on your behalf from the time they make the bed for you to lie on; it is great help and support. If somebody takes or steals property away from me—that is not cultural tradition. Imagine, the community gathering together, the old folk again assembling and discussing your issues; that is immeasurable assistance. They continue to take care of you from the time of death through the burial to the cleansing day. I could not be more grateful."

Brown added, "As I told you, mine was not a smooth process, but I did all I had to do in the traditional manner, all that my elders prescribed for me. I was told that if I did not do it I would die. I followed every step of the cultural rituals' process. This is why I am here today and still able to talk to you. I would have long died after my husband. Cultural rituals are a very important part of our lives and very useful too. Because of

some unresolved issues, I went from my in-laws' home after the burial to my parents' home in order to do all that was needed for me to do traditionally.”

All the participants who contributed expressed that they would not have gone through their husband's death ceremony without traditional treatment at all. They were very adamant about the importance and utility of traditional structures, especially the preventive aspect.

Despite most participants affirming that all the cultural rituals were helpful and important, there was some discussion about unhelpful aspects of cultural rituals. Koki mentioned that elders should not force traditional medicines on widows. Her remark was greeted once more by the group using body language and actions to denote dismissal or rejection (the widows turned their heads to look at her with eyes rounded as if to say she that she cannot say what she just said). There were no more responses to the question concerning the “less helpful” cultural practices.

Theme VII: Counseling—an Unknown Phenomenon

Towards the end of the meeting participants were asked if they attended any counseling sessions during their mourning. Participants flatly expressed that they did not know anything at all about counseling service. While participants from the first focus group communicated a vague knowledge about the counseling services, Koki, a registered nurse, was unique in mentioning a two-day session that she had with a social worker and some words of wisdom from her mother.

Chedu said, “I did not know or hear of anybody who did that kind of job.”

Koki remarked, “As far as I know there is no counseling, let alone grief counseling.”

Mogodi followed suit, “I really did not know where to go to with my concerns or who to ask for help. This is the reason that I took up all those odd jobs available to support my children.”

Tebamo reiterated a lack of knowledge about counseling and Mabaka said, “I was helped by the *councilor* (a local governor) then, who gave me some work to refurbish his house. I did not know of anybody that could help me differently from that *councilor*.”

Bothale stated, “I did not know of such a service. I talked to other widows who I knew whenever I was distressed.”

Theme VIII: Widows' Recommendations to Policy Makers

Participants were asked to suggest recommendations to policy makers regarding the utility of cultural rituals following the death of a husband. Participants spoke strongly about keeping traditional culture and practices alive. These sentiments had also been expressed strongly in the first focus group.

Brown mentioned that she would have died had she not heeded the elders' advice, “Widows should undertake traditional treatment to avoid *boswagadi*, which may bring death upon the widow's next partner.”

Mogodi stressed that culture is who *we* are and that what the elders did in the past should always be respected, otherwise people would experience mysterious deaths. This was the second time that Mogodi stressed that “cultural rituals are a way of life and should always be observed like our forefathers did.”

Reba commented that, as a people, we should stop copying everything from other cultures, “In the olden days food was not cooked in the bereaved family's home, but today a funeral is like a wedding and it is a waste of resources for the surviving widow

and her family.” Botlhale added that a woman who has lost a husband should lie down to respect herself, her husband, and her community. All participants who contributed to this discussion stressed maintaining the cultural tradition except for Koki, who was skeptical about some cultural practices.

After all deliberation the widows were asked if there was something they wanted to add to the discussion that might have been left out. They had nothing to add. A vote of thanks was given by a research assistant and the meeting was closed with a prayer led by the chairperson of the HBCC. Participants sang some joyful folk songs to us, others ululated. They asked us to come again for more discussions on grief and wished us well on our journey. This was a sign that we were welcome and the service we provided was appreciated.

A summary of themes that emerged from participants’ transcripts is presented in table 5 below, and a summary of recommendations to the policy makers is presented in table 6.

TABLE 5

Summary of Themes from Focus Group II

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering together and securing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly Support and care Love and respect
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i> : An appropriate act	Care and respect A sign of mourning Spiritual connection Cultural tradition Community expectation Preliminary treatment
Theme III	The night vigil	Intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but, with soothing reflections, Confirms death In communion with the Lord Community support
Theme IV	Garbing	Spiritual connection with deceased Love, respect, and honor to deceased Sign of widowhood Acceptance of loss
Theme V	The burial	Time to realize the truth about death Intense pain, but acceptance of loss Strange bodily experiences Confusion and disorientation Time for children to express feelings
Theme VI	Cleansing and “undressing”	Arena for the elderly Remove <i>senyama</i> Renewal of pain Prevents lethal ailments Community expectation Confirms of widowhood
Theme VII	Counseling	An unknown phenomenon

TABLE 6

Widows Recommendation—Focus Group II

Theme VIII	Widows' recommendations to policy makers	Keep tradition alive Removes senyama Contains <i>boswagadi</i> Prevents lethal ailments
------------	--	--

Key Informant Interviews

I conducted seven individual interviews with key informants. One key informant interview was conducted after the first focus group discussion. This key informant chose not to share her story with an audience in the focus group, describing the focus group members as youngsters. For this reason she was asked if she would be willing to participate as a key informant. She agreed, and the data obtained from this key informant filled in many gaps identified in the transcripts from the first focus group discussion.

While adhering to the focus of the investigation (involvement of widows in the performance of cultural rituals when mourning their husbands), I inquired into the meanings attached to the cultural practices performed during the funeral ceremony. Focus group discussions had not fully addressed specific cultural rituals, including those that I too had often observed, but did not understand meanings associated with them. Information from the key informants served to reinforce and triangulate data presented by members of both focus groups.

Two other key informants were identified during the second focus group meeting, but declined to be interviewed after the meeting because they had no more time to spend for another interview. The other four key informants who were not part of the second focus group were identified in the village with the help of the HBCC staff. During this

visit, I was able to select those widows who were more open and willing to share their stories. I asked to interview all six participants by telephone and requested only thirty minutes of their day. They agreed and we scheduled interview times for each one of them. I conducted three interviews over two days.

Despite a different mode of data collection used with the six key informants, I assured them of confidentiality and privacy. For those who had not taken part in the focus group discussion, I took time to explain thoroughly the purpose of the study and focus group discussion. I let them know that participation was voluntary and if they wanted to withdraw from the study at any time, they were free to do so. Furthermore I explained that their withdrawal from the inquiry would not affect their life or relationships with the investigator in any way. Widows were asked to sign a consent form as evidence of willingness to participate in focus group discussions as well as individual interviews. Pseudo names were used for participants to preserve confidentiality and ensure their privacy.

Key Informant Interview 1—Mama-T

The first face-to-face individual interview followed immediately after the first focus group discussion and was video-recorded. Mama-T, a 69-year-old widow who had expressed discomfort in being in a focus group with participants she described as younger people.

Realizing that the first focus group had emphasized performing certain cultural rituals and that there had been little opportunity to discuss the meanings associated with them, I targeted those areas in my interview with Mama-T. Having drawn from the focus group that counseling was not available in Village A, the question on counseling was not

posed to Mama-T. The interview was conducted in the Ndebele language, with which Mama-T was comfortable, and also my mother tongue. Mama-T was an elementary school graduate and may have not been able to express herself fully in English.

I asked Mama-T to relate her experience of the cultural rituals that followed the death of her husband. Despite minor variations, procedures that were observed for her husband's funeral were identical to those of the focus group members. I inquired as to whether there were traditional herbs used during this time. Mama-T explained that her husbands' clan did not use any herbs, but she knew of other clans that made use of traditional herbs during the *lying-in* period.

Reflecting on the depth of emphasis that was placed on the ritual of *lying-in* by members of both focus groups, I posed a question, "Mama- T, can you tell me what makes it necessary for a widow to lie down immediately after her husband's death is known?"

Raising her head to look at me, she emphatically said, "It is culture; it has always been done that way. It is a *moila* (taboo) when your better half is gone to be seen to be moving around freely! It is unheard of; it is tantamount to a bad omen."

Members of both focus groups had related some feelings of weakness after hearing of the death of their husbands. As a result I sought for clarity concerning the tender care and treatment that is suddenly given to the widow. "How come the widow is not only referred to, but is treated as a *molwetsi* (patient) following the death of her husband?" Mama-T answered, "The widow does become a patient, due to the heart-wrenching pain of losing her husband. Some people are known to have even fainted when they heard the news of their husbands' death. It feels like something dark has come over

you, even when you walk, the ground feels uneven under your feet and you cannot maintain your normal balance. You cannot even get your mind together.”

A significant number of widows mentioned that they felt some general physical weakness once they heard of the death of their husbands and had to be supported all the time they walked around. Botho, a member of the first focus group, also described a feeling of some “dark cloud” over her at the burial.

As soon as Mama-T mentioned “uneven ground” and “balance,” I seized the opportunity to find out from her if that could be the reason the new widow is always physically supported by somebody whenever they walked around. Mama-T agreed whole-heartedly and remarked, “You feel really weak, and cannot walk any reasonable distance without suddenly ‘slumping’” to the ground. Since I spent my childhood in Village A and had the opportunity to attend some funeral gatherings and observe some cultural rituals, I asked Mama-T about the tourniquet that is placed around the widow’s abdomen. She explained, “It is to make one strong; it feels as if something is moving about in your stomach (*pointing to her abdominal area*).” This feeling described by Mama-T confirms the feeling of hollowness described by Worden (2002) when he discussed some of physical symptoms that are commonly experienced by bereaved persons.

We then proceeded to discuss some procedures that are undertaken during the night vigil. I requested Mama-T to tell me what actually takes place in the widow’s room during the night. She explained that the people who come into the widow’s room are her husband’s relatives, her own relatives, and very close friends and neighbors who are quite familiar with her way of life. “During this time the elderly women from both clans advise

the widow on how she needs to conduct herself. They tell her to talk only in whispers before burial, and her voice should never be heard by people outside the house...it is unimaginable, and it is culture; it has to be done *just* that way. This is what I did.”

This was the second time that Mama-T stressed the point of ‘just observing culture.’ The same stance about cultural tradition was mentioned and emphasized by some members of both focus groups. Mogodi, the most senior member of the second group mentioned more than twice during discussions that “it is culture and it has always been done that way.”

We then discussed the burial; I asked if there were any special activities at this stage and the meanings attached to these. There was not much that was done in the traditional way before the burial according to Mama-T. She said the major activity is after the burial. The widow is prescribed some purging traditional medicines that are intended to cleanse her internally. This is done to remove *seriti* and to disconnect her spiritually from her late husband. Mama-T stated that one thing she experienced was that an elderly widow from her husband’s clan spit a paste of melon seed into her ears to prevent deafness.

The ritual of preventing deafness was mentioned several times by members of focus group two. Although the ritual was performed at different stages during mourning, it served the same purpose. Mama-T mentioned that after the burial, the widow gets specially cooked mutton tripe treated with some herbs which she described as “tasting really bad.” One key informant, Bothale, mentioned that the manner in which this ritual was performed helped her to disconnect herself from her husband. I asked about the *kicking-in* of a portion of earth during the final *goodbyes*, which I have observed in most

funerals that I had attended previously in Village A. All the participants who contributed their experience mentioned that they *kicked-in* a portion of the soil into the grave as a way of saying their final farewell. Mama-T once again stressed that it was their ethnicity that underlay the traditional act, which was “the way they do it and it has always been that way.” This stance about culture and cultural origins was echoed several times in both focus groups.

I reflected on my previous experienced, “There is a ritual of breaking a cup and a plate on top of the grave once it has been filled up with earth, what is this for?”

Mama-T responded, “Indeed a cup and a plate are broken onto the grave top. This is to show the elders (ancestors) that the deceased had his own cup to drink from and a plate for eating. It is also means that he should take his cup and plate with him—these utensils symbolize his belongings.”

I explored further about sorghum grains that I have observed being sprinkled on the grave top as well. “It is a cultural behavior which is observed specifically during the plowing season. If it is not done, *his* spirit may depress yields from the fields resulting in a poor harvest,” Mama-T informed.

“Tell me about the meaning of the breaking the gourd also onto the grave top,” I inquired, reflecting on my previous observations of Mama-T performing some of these rituals in local funerals.

Mama-T responded in a calm manner, “This is done at any season of the year. The gourd contains water; as you break it the water splashes on the grave. This procedure must always be performed. It is intended to give him water to take along and quench his thirst on his long journey.”

Concerning the cleansing ceremony, Mama-T admitted not knowing much about the herbs that are used, indicating that they are only known to the traditional healer who performs the cleansing. “However the widow does take some of these herbs for a week or two depending on what the traditional healer will have discovered when he casts his bones.” (Casting bones is equivalent to a physical assessment performed by a medical doctor). The traditional healer in this case would “cast bones” to find out if there is anything going wrong in the widow’s life and to find the appropriate way of dealing with the problem.

“Opening” and “lighting” the house during the cleansing ceremony emerged as an important discussion point in both focus groups. I sought for clarification about this ritual from Mama-T. “This literally means bringing some light into the house. The house would have been closed for the duration of the mourning period and is considered *in darkness* for this reason. The lighting ritual is intended to rid the house of *senyama* that resulted from the death of a husband and also that the widow does not feel scared of going into the house. A member of the first focus group, Botho, mentioned that she was scared of entering the room she had previously used with her husband.

“There is a special tree called *muhagauwe* whose dried branches are used to make a fire and a burning branch is then whisked around the house to make light,” Mama-T explained. This mode of lighting the house was mentioned in both focus groups even though some widows had used candles instead. The sub-theme of associating death with a black spirit also emerged several times during both focus group discussions and with great emphasis.

One other insight that Mama-T provided was that the cleansing ceremony is undertaken in the early hours of the morning, and that spilling traditional beer on the ground is done to appease the ancestors. Most widows who contributed on the cleansing ritual mentioned spilling traditional brew on the ground. Generally, the process of cleansing that was described by Mama-T was identical to what was described by members of both focus groups.

Regarding *go apolwa*, which is part of the cleansing ceremony, Mama-T added that in her case it was supposed to be headed by her late husbands' younger brother. She objected to this, describing him as "a young man with whom I cannot even "drink water" (go to bed with)." Mama-T then explained that *go apolwa* is done by elders; they remove the mourning dress from the widow and help her dress in her new attire. The old attire is taken away by an elderly woman or, depending on their agreement among members of the clan; it can be taken away for burial by the traditional healer. "It is never incinerated," emphasized Mama-T. Mama-T shared that she decided to keep her dress because she feared somebody might take it and cause some ill-fortune to her.

Changing the tone of the discussion, I asked Mama-T to make recommendations to policy makers in Botswana regarding the use of cultural rituals during the death ceremony of a husband. Mama-T appeared rather unsure of what to say, "To the government? If one does not follow cultural tradition she may develop *seromo*. I could also let them know that if the widow does not follow the tradition of her husband's clan, she may get hurt."

I asked her to explain what she meant by 'getting hurt.' She emphatically explained, "She may get continuous palpitations, become deaf, develop mysterious rashes

on her skin and may be generally unwell. So cultural tradition must be observed and must not be left to die. A widow must follow what the people of her husband's clan want her to observe." The strength of cultural ritual was emphasized in both focus groups for all the ceremonies surrounding the husband's death, and in general day-to-day lives.

Towards the end of our discussion I asked what it meant for a widow (for her) to have all these cultural activities done on her behalf, including the assistance from her husbands' clan, friends and neighbors. Promptly she said, "It means respect for me, my family and my deceased husband; even though we had our differences, my in-laws portrayed a good picture publicly during my *dark* days." Both focus groups emphasized the theme of respect.

At the conclusion of our discussion I asked if there was anything I may have out left that Mama-T would like to add. She said, "Yes, you know if the traditional rituals are not done well, it may cause the elders (ancestors) to be discontent; a number of mysterious illnesses may ensue or disharmony among family members may erupt. Sometimes even the deceased himself may tell you in a dream or vision what rituals he would like to have done for him properly." A summary of themes that emerged from this interview is presented in a table 7 below. A summary of recommendations made by Mama-T to the policy makers is presented in table 8.

TABLE 7

Summary of themes from Key Informant I (Mama-T)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and securing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for elders Respect to self and community Care and support
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Community expectation Sign of mourning Traditional culture
Theme III	Being garbed	
Theme IV	The night vigil	Support and advice for the widow
Theme V	The burial	Ancestor appeasement
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleansing and “undressing”)	Traditional culture An arena for the elderly Respect, care, and support to the widow Prevent lethal ailments Appease ancestors Remove <i>senyama</i>

TABLE 8

Recommendations from Key Informant I (Mama-T)

Theme VII	Recommendations to Policy Makers	Keep tradition alive Prevents lethal ailments Strict observance of clan’s cultural practices
-----------	----------------------------------	--

Key Informant Telephone Interviews

I conducted six individual interviews with key informants by phone two days after the second focus group discussion. Following the second focus group meeting, I was

accompanied by one member of the HBCC to identify more widows in the village and request their participation as key informants. With the HBCC staff, I located five widows, four of whom were willing to participate in individual interviews. Members of the second focus group, particularly those I had selected for individuals interviews, had indicated that they could not spend any more time with me; they were lagging behind in gathering the *mophane* worm and cultivating their fields. I was able to conduct three interviews with key informants over two days, each interview thirty minutes in duration.

The questions posed in the individual interviews with key informants were identical. Mama-T's interview was the exception in focusing on the practice and meanings of bereavement rituals. Key informant interview questions are available in Appendix C.

Key Informant Interview 2—Same'

Same' was a 45 year-old widow who did not attend the focus group discussion, but was willing to be a key informant. Same' was a field officer who worked with HBC Services of Village B and a high school graduate. This interview was conducted in the *Setswana* language with which Same' was comfortable, which I am also fluent in, even though a second language. She interjected some English phrases during the discussion, which was helpful during data analysis.

Same' found the traditional rituals helpful in accepting the reality of her husband's death and that she would never see him again. She remembers that being indoors and the *lying-in* were especially helpful, as were having the elders gather around her until the burial and being garbed in black. Being indoors allowed her to cry as much as she wanted, and the elders' comfort and support allowed her to accept the death of her

husband. “Having different elderly widows coming in at different times to comfort me; it helped me to accept my position of being a widow and to look forward to life. The elderly women consoled me and stressed to me that this is the end—my husband is dead and gone. I found it in myself to face up to the challenges ahead thanks to the undivided emotional support I drew from the elders. Particularly being garbed in dark colors differentiated me from everybody else in my surrounding, and this made me strong (in my heart), and I accepted the loss of my husband and my widowhood state faster than I had anticipated.”

Same’ found an element of the cleansing ceremony unhelpful. Unlike the elders who believe in cleansing, she reported not believing in cleansing and blood purification and would have preferred not taking the traditional herbs. “My personal philosophy is that cleansing is non-existent; I see it as just bringing unnecessary discomfort upon the widow by having her take in all these bitter concoctions. I take it that if I am garbed for my husband; I have done all that I need to do for him. I am totally against taking of traditional medicines.”

Same’ saw her involvement in the ritual performances demonstrating the love and respect she had for her husband even after his death. She did not attend any professional counseling intervention services during her mourning, but does report being comforted by the elders at home.

Same’s recommendations to Botswana’s policy makers were somewhat different from the other participants in the study. “Let the elders know that culture is dynamic; it should not be a *must* that everyone whose husband passes away should undergo traditional rituals. It should be a voluntary act. Everyone should mourn the death of their

beloved one in their own way—a way that suits them best; it should not be common to everybody.”

When asked about recommendations regarding professional counseling, Same’ thought it should have a place in the community and in the bereavement process. “At least every community should have access to professional counselors, who also should provide some pastoral counseling at funerals to encourage the bereaved family. They should be included as much in the funeral program as pastors are, to have their say in the funeral as it may be necessary.” Same’ strongly expressed that relatives of the deceased should desist from claiming ownership of his estate. She proposed that counselors should intervene in such circumstances.

A summary table of themes that emerged from this interview is presented in table 9; and a summary of recommendations made to the policy makers is presented in table 10.

TABLE 9

Summary of Themes from Key Informant 2 (Same')

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly
Theme II	Lying-in	Support and care Love and care Sign of mourning
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Support and care Affirms death Acceptance of loss
Theme IV	Garbing	Arena for the elderly
Theme V	The Burial	Acceptance of loss
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleansing and “undressing”)	Arena for the elderly Love and respect for deceased Support and respect from elders Strength to face challenges Unnecessary discomfort Traditional practices out dated Struggle over deceased estate
Theme VII	Counseling	Not attended/not known

TABLE 10

Recommendations from Key Informant 2 (Same')

Theme VIII	Recommendations to policy makers	Cultural tradition should be flexible Allowance for individualized grief Counselors to provide support in funerals Counselors available for every community Counselors to intervene during struggles over estate
------------	----------------------------------	--

Key Informant Interview 3—Joyce

Joyce, a 45-year old widow, did not take part in the focus group interview but was willing to be interviewed individually. Joyce is a housewife and an elementary school graduate.

Joyce found the traditional rituals helpful in developing new and better relationships with her in-laws and children. Because the rituals were seen as signs of her respecting their (her in-laws) word, their deceased son and her family, she now has a good relationship with them. She was thankful that her observance of traditional rituals had been beneficial to her.

“I observed all that I needed to do for my husband in the cultural way. This was very helpful to me in that everything is going according to my expectations, I am free from all dangerous conditions associated with *senyama*; it is for the same reason that I am still alive and able to raise my children. My life is in order due to proper observance of cultural tradition...all the rituals that the elders prescribed for me. I had to be respectful of culture so that my life does not become complicated in any way. Right now I can say

everything in my life is moving smoothly, because I respected traditional culture, I have no sickness, and I feel very well physically.”

Joyce described similar feelings about the ritual practices as other widows from the focus groups. “As I lay down for my husband, I was in deep mourning for his death. I had to respect his departure. It also meant that I had to learn to give up, comfort myself and go on with my life. I felt respected and cared for by my elders and this helped me to cope and accept my husband’s death. The night vigil affirmed that I had indeed lost a valuable friend, and I realized that I had no power to change anything; it was the end and my life would never be the same.

“The burial was the most painful part too, but I only had to accept the loss, there was nothing else to do. Regarding the cleansing, I could say it was all right for me, since it meant that I am free to do everything like everybody else did, but I would never see my husband anymore. I can also say that all these things I did were rightful actions in the cultural tradition, and that I had to do them to mourn my husband.”

Joyce recommended that policy makers continue to encourage people to follow cultural tradition because it prevents a lot of lethal ailments. They must not get rid of their cultural roots. She added that cultural practices help one to accept loss, to be safe from “death pollutants” and to give up on the loss and look forward to life. The elders were very encouraging on the aspect of acceptance. Joyce did not attend any counseling sessions following the death of her husband. A summary of themes that emerged from this interview is presented in Table 11; and a summary of recommendations made to the policy makers is presented in table 12.

TABLE 11

Summary of Themes from Key Informant 3 (Joyce)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly Support and care
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Sign of mourning Cultural tradition Love and respect
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Acceptance of loss Affirms loss
Theme IV	Garbing	Sign of widowhood
Theme V	The burial	Acceptance of loss
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleaning and undressing)	Prevents lethal ailments Respect to elders and traditional culture Acceptance of loss Strengthens relationships with in-laws Removes <i>senyama</i> Freedom to interact socially
Theme VII	Counseling	Not attended/unknown

TABLE 12

Recommendations from Key Informant 3 (Joyce)

Theme VIII	Recommendations to policy makers	Keep traditional culture alive Support from elders Enhance acceptance of loss
------------	----------------------------------	---

Key Informant Interview 4—Botlhale

Botlhale was one of the vocal and very insightful members of the second focus group. Our exchange brought out Botlhale's respect for the preventive aspect of cultural rituals, "It was right and helpful for me to observe culture, without which I would have been hurt; I could have become deaf, or my body could have developed *seromo*. It also meant that I had a loss and should take time to mourn the loss. I received care from my elders as I lay down to respect of his death."

Unlike Same', Botlhale found eating certain foods and taking traditional herbs for purification helpful in that she was cleansed from *senyama*. "Everybody has a way of doing things according to cultural expectations, if they do not do it, they may be disabled in some way or develop *seromo*. It was helpful for me that my elders worked to prevent these different conditions from occurring to me. I had a specially prepared goat liver, cooked in herbs to help me accept my husband's death. I was to chew on it and spit it out as a way of making closure with my husband (in the culture of Batswana, spitting is a sign of rejection)."

Botlhale reported that involvement in rituals meant that she was a woman in mourning and should deal with it and come to accept the death of her husband. Even though, knowing that she would never be with him again and feeling a great deal of pain. The night vigil and the burial confirmed the reality of his death and allowed her to accept it.

"When it came the time for cleansing I was pleased since it meant that his *seriti* was being removed from around me. At the same time, the house was "opened" and "lit," this helped not to be scared whenever I entered it. "Undressing" from mourning clothes also

removed *senyama*, and I was able to mingle with other people, which I had not been able to do for some time. When (elders) gave away my husband's belongings it was good for me, and helped me avoid thinking about him unnecessarily whenever I would see his belongings around the house.”

As with many participants, Botlhale's recommendations to the policy makers in Botswana about the use of the indigenous cultural rituals showed strong support of traditional culture. “The government should encourage observance of cultural tradition on its citizens. Culture is who we are.”

A summary of themes that emerged from this interview is presented in Table 13; and summary of recommendations made to the policy makers is presented in table 14.

TABLE 13

Summary Table of Themes from Key Informant 4 (Botlhale)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly Support and care
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Affirms loss Acceptance of loss Sign of mourning Love and respect
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Acceptance of loss Affirms death
Theme IV	Garbing	Acceptance of loss Sign of widowhood
Theme V	The burial	Affirms death Acceptance of loss Excruciating pain
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleaning and undressing)	Prevents lethal ailments Removes <i>senyama</i> Freedom to mingle socially Rid reminders about deceased Respect to elders and culture Sign of mourning Struggle over estate Love and respect for deceased. Does not cure HIV
Theme VII	Counseling	Unknown

TABLE 14

Recommendations Key Informant 4 (Botlhale)

Theme VIII	Recommendations to policy makers	Keep traditional culture alive Government to reinforce traditional culture.
------------	----------------------------------	--

Key Informant Interview 5—Lulu

Lulu was a 35-year old widow who did not participate in either focus group discussion, but was willing to be interviewed individually as a key informant. Lulu was an elementary graduate. Her experience of observing cultural rituals was colored by an illness she contracted prior to her husband's death, "I only did what the elders asked me to do; I took it that they have the know-how and if I do not heed their advice I may contract some illnesses that one gets when they have not been treated in the traditional way after their husband died. As I lay down I endured a lot of pain when each person came with a message of condolences, it was the same pain-evoking message said over and over again."

Lulu found none of the rituals helpful, "Nothing was helpful to me; I still feel the same way as I was before my husband died. When my husband died, I was not well and I am still not well despite the traditional treatment that I undertook. I had hoped that after this treatment my physical health would improve, but it has proven futile."

The burial and cleansing ceremony were very painful for her, chiefly because they brought up thoughts of her husband. However, she found it comforting that instead of giving away her husband's belongings, these things were passed on to his children. She had a stoic and dutiful viewpoint about the meaning of cultural rituals.

"It meant that I should accept that I am a widow and look forward to life and raise my children, since there was nothing else I could do. All the rituals that I undertook were to observe cultural tradition; it is our way of life and I just had to do it."

Lulu thought that the Botswana Government should encourage people to be tested for HIV and take the necessary steps to restore their health. She thought that if people only concentrated on traditional healing, they might think that their physical illnesses would be cured like she did, which proved the contrary. A summary of themes from this interview is presented in table 15 below; and a summary of recommendations made to the policy makers are presented in table 16.

TABLE 15

Summary of Themes from Key Informant 5 (Lulu)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	An arena for adults Hurtful, repetition of condolence message Sign of mourning
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Affirms loss Acceptance of loss Care and support Love and respect
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Affirms of death
Theme IV	Garbing	Sign of widowhood Acceptance of loss
Theme V	The burial	Affirms death Acceptance of loss
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleaning and undressing)	Remove <i>senyama</i> Prevents lethal ailments Estate passed onto children Renewed pain of loss Does not cure HIV Respect to elders Traditional culture
Theme VII	Counseling	Not attended/unknown

TABLE 16

Recommendations from Key Informant 5 (Lulu)

Theme VIII	Recommendations to policy makers	Priority is to take HIV test Obey elders
------------	----------------------------------	---

Key Informant Interview 6—Sarah

Sarah was a 46-year old widow who participated in the second focus group discussion. She was most willing to share her experiences with the group, but had a sore throat that limited her ability to share. I asked her to be part of the individual interviews due to her willingness. By the time I undertook the individual interviews, I anticipated that she would have improved physically, which turned out to be true.

Sarah found the cultural rituals helpful in dealing with the loss of her husband. They provided a meaningful context in which she felt she was now a widow and should deal with the situation and accept it. The elderly women sitting around her and helping her enabled her to cope with the whole situation of loss.

There were two specific rituals Sarah found especially helpful, “I was advised to use a tree bark instead of my hand to scratch myself; I also used another bark to eat with in place of my hand. If I had not done this I would have died. I used these pieces of bark until the burial, after which I could use my own hand to eat or scratch myself. Some elderly widow chewed some melon seeds and spat the paste onto my ears and announced that my husband had died and that I should accept it. It was also a way of ‘opening my ears’ (preventing deafness).”

Sarah echoed many of the other widows in finding that the cultural rituals helped her to adjust to a new definition of herself as a widow. She reported that her involvement in performing the rituals were a sign that she was bereaved and should mourn the death of her husband and pay him due respect, accepting her position of widowhood. “I was not garbed because of my religion; however the cleansing day evoked

painful memories of my husband's death. Also on this day, there was a lot of confusion as his relatives started fighting over his belongings. It was most agonizing."

Sarah thought that the Government should encourage cultural observance because it helped to prevent a lot of illnesses, especially *seromo*. "Cultural tradition is most important in cleansing because it removes *senyama* around you. Even though there was confusion over belongings, I appreciate that I got treated in the traditional way." A summary of themes that emerged from this interview are presented in table 17; and a summary of recommendations made to the policy makers is presented in table 18.

TABLE 17

Summary of Themes from Key Informant 6 (Sarah)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for the elderly Support and care
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Sign of mourning Love and respect
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Affirms death
Theme IV	Garbing	Acceptance of loss Sign of widowhood
Theme V	The burial	Acceptance of loss
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleaning and undressing)	Removes <i>senyama</i> Prevents lethal ailments Renewal of pain of loss Respect to elders Respect cultural tradition Love and respect to deceased Sign of mourning Struggle over estate
Theme VII	Counseling	Not attended/not known

TABLE 18

Recommendations from Key Informant 6 (Sarah)

Theme VIII	Recommendations to policy makers	Keep traditional culture alive Prevents lethal illnesses
---------------	----------------------------------	---

Key Informant Interview 7—Bongani

Bongani was a 40-year old widow who was not part of the focus group but agreed to participate in an individual interview as a key informant. Bongani was a high school graduate and a kindergarten (nursery) teacher.

Similar to other participants Bongani was of the affirmative that cultural rituals benefited her by removing *senyama*. “If I was not treated traditionally, I would harbor *senyama* for the rest of my life.” Bongani mentioned that there were traditional herbs that were prescribed to her specifically to remove *senyama*. Bongani described some discomfort with some traditional practices. “There is a lot that I went through. During the *lying-in* period, I experienced great pain, it seems the pain got the best of me because I was lying down most of the time and not moving about at all. The pain was compounded by the same condolence message repeated over and over again, it became too much for me, and I really wished people would not say anything at all.”

She said being garbed defined her as a widow and also helped her deal with the loss and made her to develop inner strength to face challenges ahead. “This process was all right for me, my elders cared for me, they garbed me in green clothes, I felt respected and they also instituted traditional treatment for me.” Like the rest of the widows Bongani found the burial most hurtful, however she accepted the loss as beyond her

control. She experienced renewed pain of loss during cleansing, which was compounded by a struggle over the deceased estate that ensued between her and her in-laws.

However Bongani was pleased with the completion of the entire mourning process and spent less time worrying about the estate she had lost to her in-laws. “Besides the struggle over my husbands’ property, my in-laws were helpful to me by getting rid of his *seriti* which would taint me with *senyama* for the rest of my life, if left unattended.” She said the cleansing helped her to make closure with her husband and go on with her life. Bongani said she felt liberated to join mainstream society and thus accepted her widowhood state. While dressed in mourning clothes, Bongani said she felt restricted to socialize with her community members, who also appeared uncomfortable with her. These attitudes from the community were reversed by her cleansing and “undressing.”

Bongani expressed that traditional culture was very useful since it prevented lethal conditions that once contracted could not be reversed. She suggested further that the government conduct countrywide seminars on traditional culture, so that our culture does not become extinct.

A summary of themes from this interview are presented in Table 19 below, and summary of Bongani’s recommendations made to the policy makers is presented in table 20.

TABLE 19

Summary of Themes from Key Informant 7 (Bongani)

Themes	Bereavement Stages	Meanings Construed
Theme I	Community gathering and preparing a place for <i>lying-in</i>	Arena for elders Love and respect
Theme II	<i>Lying-in</i>	Sign of mourning Support and care Sign of widowhood Face life challenges Depression from lack of exercise Same condolence message evoked pain
Theme III	The Night Vigil	Affirms death Acceptance of loss
Theme IV	Garbing	Sign of widowhood Acceptance of loss Face challenges ahead
Theme V	The burial	Signals the end Acceptance of loss Excruciating pain
Theme VI	Involvement in cultural rituals (Cleaning and undressing)	Removes <i>senyama</i> Enhanced closure Face up to challenges ahead Renewal of pain Struggle over estate Freedom to interact socially Defined as a widow and accorded respect Respect elders Respect traditional culture Love and respect to the deceased Prevents lethal ailments
Theme VII	Counseling	Not known

TABLE 20

Recommendations from Key Informant 7 (Bongani)

Theme VII	Recommendations to Policy makers	Countrywide seminars on cultural tradition Keep traditional culture alive Prevents lethal ailments
-----------	----------------------------------	--

Table 21 shows a synthesis of all the themes that emerged from the participants' transcripts and the frequency with which each theme occurred in focus groups.

TABLE 21

A Synthesis of Themes from all Participants

Bereavement Stages	Participant Responses								
	KI1	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6	KI7	FG1	FG2
<i>Community Gathering...</i>									
Arena for elders	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Support and care	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12x
<i>Lying-in</i>									
Sign of Mourning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	11x
Love and respect	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Spiritual connection								5x	12x
Affirmation of loss	x							5x	10x
Cultural tradition	x		x		x		x	3x	9x
Community expectation	x		x		x			5x	11x
<i>The night vigil</i>									
Confirms death		x						2x	6x
Acceptance of loss	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Intensive pain, intrusive thoughts—soothing reflections		x						5x	12x
In communion with the Lord								5x	10x
<i>Garbing</i>									
Arena for the elderly	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Spiritual connection	x		x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Love , respect, and honor	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Sign of widowhood	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Acceptance of loss	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x

Bereavement Stages	Participant Responses								
	KI1	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6	KI7	FG1	FG2
Community expectation/elder support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
<i>The burial</i>									
Time to realize the truth		x		x				5x	12x
Intense pain-acceptance of death		x		x		x		5x	7x
Strange bodily experiences	x							5x	8x
Confusion and disorientation	x							3x	6x
<i>Cleansing and Undressing</i>									
Arena for the elderly	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Remove <i>senyama</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Acceptance of loss		x		x	x	x	x	5x	10x
Renews pain of loss						x	x	5x	12x
Community expectation	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Respect care and widow support	x	x			x	x	x	3x	7x
Love and respect to widow	x		x	x	x	x	x	3x	12x
Respect to elders			x	x	x		x	4x	10x
Respect traditional culture	x	x		x	x		x	5x	12x
Cultural tradition	x			x	x		x	5x	8x
Confirms widowhood				x	x	x	x	5x	10x
<i>Counseling</i>									
Unknown/unattended	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	11x

Table 22 indicates the less common themes that emerged among participants. These themes enriched the investigation findings and posed implications for counseling.

TABLE 22

Less Common Themes from Participants' Transcripts

Bereavement Stages	Participants' Responses								
	KI1	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6	KI7	FG1	FG2
<i>Lying-in</i>									
Depression from lack of exercise			x					x	2x
Repeated condolence message-hurtful					x		x	x	
Preliminary preventive treatment				x					10x
<i>Garbing</i>									
Face challenges ahead							x		
<i>Burial</i>									
Appease ancestors	x								
<i>Cleansing and "undressing"</i>									
Face challenges		x					x		
Appease ancestors	x								
Strengthens relationships			x						
Freedom to interact socially			x	x			x		
Rid reminders of the deceased				x					
Unnecessary discomfort		x							
Traditional practices outdated		x							
Does not cure HIV/AIDS					x				
Struggle over deceased estate		x		x		x			x

Table 23 presents a summarized version of all recommendations contributed by participants, as well as the frequency with which each recommendation occurred in focus groups.

TABLE 23

A Synthesis of Recommendations from all Participants

Recommendations	Participants' Responses								
	KI1	KI2	KI3	KI4	KI5	KI6	KI7	FG1	FG2
<i>Keep cultural tradition alive</i>									
Prevents lethal ailments	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Removes <i>senyama</i>	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Ensures support	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	5x	12x
Use media to disseminate tradition								x	
Government to reinforce traditional culture				x			x	x	
Pass cultural tradition to children								5x	10x
<i>Cultural tradition be flexible</i> • Allow individualized grieving	x								
<i>Alternative care approach</i> • Take HIV test as priority					x				
Counselors intervention in funerals	x								
Counselor intervention in disputes	x								

Summary of Chapter IV

In this chapter, I have presented the results of this investigation under the seven major themes that were obtained from participants' transcripts. These themes were developed in accordance with the bereavement stage processes observed in the culture of Botswana. The eighth consisted of the participants recommendations to policy makers in the country. The investigation was conducted through two focus group discussions, and seven individual interviews of key informants, and my observation as the researcher

Themes were identical for both focus groups, except that sometimes descriptions of some events and experiences were more intense for some themes by one group over the other. The findings from key informant interviews, affirmed the transcripts from focus group discussions. There were about two different viewpoints that emerged in the findings of the study, although they did not influence major decisions in the study, they provided new insights and knowledge as well as having implications for counseling.

The findings of this study indicate that cultural traditions by their nature bring people together to mourn and support the bereaved family. Thus, if the person performing the rituals was an elder and the timing of rituals was appropriate according to cultural standards, enhanced healing in widows.

Participants revealed a number of deeply buried and significant beliefs about the performance and nature of traditional rituals, following the death of a husband. They described various reasons for undertaking cultural rituals. These descriptions were so vivid that it was clear for anyone to realize that they could not have undergone their husbands' funeral ceremonies without observance of cultural practices and rituals. Participants also indicated that cultural rituals undertaken following the death of a

husband protect the widow and her community from pollutants associated with death of a husband. Any widow who does not undertake traditional treatment can be ostracized by her community in an effort to avoid contact with these pollutants, supposedly emitted by the widow.

The healing mechanism inherent in traditional rituals was highlighted by the findings of this investigation. A significant number of widows confidently expressed that their life was running “smoothly” and they were alive because they had undertaken all the necessary traditional treatment. In making recommendations to the policy makers within the country, widows stressed the importance of keeping traditional culture alive; citing as an example the current health problems in Botswana, which they said resulted from disregarding cultural standards by indigenous Batswana in their day-to-day lives.

The results of this investigation revealed that widows were not differentiated during the performance of cultural rituals. It was clear that widows who had “formal education” were skeptical about some traditional performances; whereas those who had little to no education were holly embracing of most, if not all traditional practices. These revelations clearly depict a need for individualizing grief care, and considering personal preferences as well as life experiences for each widow.

Individualizing grief, as well as introducing new care approaches should be done with extreme gentleness to ensure acceptance and also to avoid upsetting the elders. The elders are the communication medium between the living and the ‘living dead.’ These insights call combination of the two care approaches to ensure availability of options to the widow and a culturally acceptable approach to care. Once again, the counseling

service can be of utility in this aspect as it strongly upholds “making choices” as one of its major principles of care-giving (Glasser, 2002).

The findings of this investigation also revealed that, the traditional structures alone could not suffice to address concerns of widows of the present generations, due to various influences on their lives. These revelations point to the need for involvement of professional counselors during the active mourning period, when widows are faced with overwhelming feelings and emotions resulting from the loss.

The results of the investigation revealed that, there were widows who had little to no support from elders during the active mourning period; these widows recounted on their experiences as most hurtful. The lack of support and the general disorganization in the traditional protocol thus, interfered with the widow’s normal healing process calling for alternative supports, specifically counseling.

Therefore, a fragmented traditional protocol and lack of support from elders appears to have had negative effects on the some widows’ healing process. If professional counselors and the traditional service providers worked collaboratively, counselors could provide encouragement and emotional support to the widow, in cases where elders do not available for duties with which they are culturally charged. Most widows expressed that they were largely appreciative of the support provided by the mourning community, as well as the care and advice they drew from elders. Therefore, a suggestion put forward is that those cultural practices which carry meaning for the bereaved, need to be considered and upheld; specifically during counseling interventions. Drawing from the insights above, a question comes to mind: How can counselors get involved in the care of the widow during the active mourning period to ensure that widows are accorded an

opportunity to make choices of the care that they want, and provision of the necessary supports that widows need during this period?

The findings of this investigation vividly delineated the position of the counseling profession within the country; specifically indicating that it is unknown to most of the rural masses. Whilst it was discernible that some widows were hurting intensely as they recounted on the experiences of the mourning the loss of their husbands, relatively speaking, they seemed to have achieved healing through the utility of traditional rituals.

In conclusion, the findings obtained from this investigation, have profound implications for counseling, pointing to the need for the combination of the traditional and professional interventions when providing care for grieving widows. A collaborative effort by these two approaches can ensure a comprehensive and culturally acceptable service to grieving widows. Such care if provided, can address client's issues from their world view, and by considering their lifestyle and system of beliefs. Arguably, in this way the counseling service can begin to gain more recognition in Botswana. Counseling is an essential service in peoples' lives. Botswana has experienced multiple social ills, more than ever before in her history, yet many Batswana still have no access to counseling services while others remain skeptical and questioning of its functions.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of Findings

The primary purpose of this investigation was to examine experiences of widows in Botswana regarding their involvement in cultural ritual of death. Focal questions that guided the study were: how do widows in Botswana experience cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourned the deaths of their husbands? What aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows? How can knowledge and insights gained from the findings of this study begin to inform culturally appropriate and responsive psychosocial interventions?

This was a qualitative investigation that used an ethnographic approach; data for the study was collected through two focus group discussions and seven individual interviews of key informants. In this chapter I have presented a summary of the findings, which include interpretations of the eight major themes that emerged from participants' transcripts. These themes are: (a) Community gathering and preparing a place for *lying-in*, (b) *Lying-in*—perceived as a rightful action, exemplifying care, and respect, (c) the night vigil was viewed as a time of intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but, with soothing reflections, (d) Garbing was seen as maintaining spiritual connections with the deceased, (e) Burial was described as time to realize the truth (about death), (f) Cleansing and “undressing were perceived as removal of the *senyama*, (g) Counseling described as an unknown phenomenon, and (h) were widows' recommendations to the policy makers in Botswana.

Conclusions regarding findings have been presented, and recommendations for future studies as well as implications for counseling have been addressed. Hypotheses that were generated from the results of the study have been presented.

The interpretation of findings under the major themes is now presented, in which some of the themes are subdivided further into sub-themes to enhance clarity of the discussion.

Community Gathering

The first and most prominent theme concerned the role that the community played towards supporting the bereaved widow. This role is not surprising because the society of Botswana upholds the spirit of community which becomes visible during times of need. As a social expectation each member of the community within the vicinity of the death home congregates with others to support the widow, at the back of their minds knowing that they are investing for future supports in case death strikes in their families. Indeed, the grief process does not occur in isolation, but in interaction with others.

Accordingly, participants indicated that the presence of mourners was of tremendous support in their time of need. These findings confirm what several writers have suggested regarding the healing mechanism inherent in the gathering of a tribe or clan when one of their members had died (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Jeffreys, 2005; Nwoye, 2005).

Specifically, Jeffreys says that this behavior has its roots in showing proof that the community is still “intact and will survive” (p.12). As might be expected participants revealed that they drew solace and comfort from seeing mourners gathered on their behalf. Furthermore, participants described this community behavior as a show of love, respect, and concern for the new-widow.

Actually, in Botswana and most countries in southern Africa, elders will support a widow who has earned their respect by her conduct and behavior towards them. This respect is commonly referred to as *botho* in the *Setswana* language or humanness. On the other hand, elders will openly ignore a person (widow) who generally looks down upon elders or who is regarded as being disrespectful to them. This is a lesson to the concerned person to cultivate the attitude of *botho* in her and her age-group as well. However it was not established by the findings of this study the reasons Botho, a participant in the first focus group, was not supported by her elders.

In a community oriented society such as Botswana, elders are unconditionally respected; if a younger person does wrong to one of them, this behavior is tantamount to having “wronged” all of them. It is primarily for this reason that, in the day-to-day lives of Batswana, younger people are strongly advised to respect elders because they may never know when may need their support the most. This collective behavior reminds us of the lifeworld existential; “lived relationality as the lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space we share with them” (van Manen 1997, p. 104). Additionally Bronfenbrenner (2002; 2005) suggests that interactions between factors in the (widow’s) environment and societal landscape fuels and steers (her) development. Bronfenbrenner posits that any change in one concentric layer ripples out to others.

As the mourners congregate at the widow’s home they provide social and emotional supports to the widow (Nwoye, 2005). This support later translates into physical support as mourners undertake preparations for the burial. Specifically, as widows pointed out earlier, an elderly previously widowed woman is nominated and assigned the new widow as her caregiver. This is done through a consensus of designated

elders or relatives of either the widow or the deceased, who will deliberate on the manner in which the widow is to be cared for and supported. Conty, a member of the first focus group, mentioned that once her husband died, a community of elders sat together and drew a plan for her care-giving endeavors. In some cases elders on site have the authority to make decision on their own regarding the care of the widow, even before other elderly mourners arrive. A good example concerned Mabaka, a member of the second focus group who stated that her grandmother spread a floor bed for her to lie down immediately following her husband's death. The support from the elders, together with the gathering of mourners, can be appropriately described as the provision of a safety network for the widow, enhancing healing to the grieving widow. Thus participants reported feeling protected as a result of the "multitudes" who turned out as a result of their loss. Davis (n.d.) in a website article succinctly put it when he said that the funeral says "COME, SUPPORT ME."

The approach to care that is visible here and culturally accepted is going out to offer help as opposed to waiting for clients to come in. This finding has implications for the conventional counseling intervention; counselors need to begin "going out to clients" in observance of the served people's way of life. In this way counselors can provide a service that is culturally appropriate and sensitive and acceptable to the served populace.

Securing a Lying-in Place for the Widow

A second major finding from this study was that of securing a place for widows to lie down following the announcement of their husband's death. This theme was consistent across both focus groups and all the seven key informants. In some cases, any elderly woman, even if she were not widowed, would be expected to spread a floor bed

for the bereaved widow. Within the community there is an understanding of elderly women as sources of stability and balance, and bearers of cultural knowledge and wisdom. Hence, in times of loss, and in general life, elderly women are highly respected and provide counsel; their participation in a sacred event such as death is viewed as a blessing and has implications for healing. One key informant mentioned that, once the elders congregated around her, secured *lying-in* space and encouraged her to face up to the event of death, she felt some inner strength to face up to the challenges ahead. A significant number of participants expressed deep appreciation and contentment for elders' support not only for this part of the ceremony, but with the entire conduct of the funeral ceremony. Therefore, when care was provided by elders, widows reported soothing experiences. Such a positive experiences have an ability to enhance healing for grieving widows.

Lack of Support

One important sub-theme that emerged from the major theme of “securing a place for the widow” related to lack of support that Botho, a member of Focus Group I, encountered following the death of her husband. She reported with deep hurt in her soul that her bed was spread by a concerned younger woman who was actively married at the time. Botho used very strong terms to describe the attitude of her mother-in-law, such as “devil,” “carefree,” “with folded arms.” Botho was the only participant out of 24 who cried bitterly and throughout the discussion when sharing her experience. This shows the power that the elders possess to sooth the bereaved widow through their supportive presence and active participation; even if elders did not play an active part, their presence

graces the occasion. It is not uncommon to hear elders say, "I will just come and sit around, as I do not have much energy to run around."

It is important to note that it is not as if Botho had no one to support her; her difficulty derived from lack of support by the "rightful" or "designated" people, according to cultural standards. While it is not readily known why Botho's elders behaved the way they did, given that such undertakings are decided through a consensus of elders, it can be assumed that they had strong and justifiable reasons for their "non-action." The most obvious reason is that, if Botho's mother-in-law did not authorize the undertaking of the necessary rituals, despite the community spirit prevailing in the country, no other elder had authority to do anything for Botho. Her mother-in-law was the key person to lead this process, more so that she was a widow. Whatever was the cause of this elder "non-action," it must be acknowledged in grief terms that Botho experienced hurt from losing her husband which was compounded also by lack of elder support causing her even greater pain, loneliness and insecurity. For all humane reasons, Botho needed an alternative safety network. Hence, and the counseling service can be of utility in such instances, if it can be allocated space and provided collaboratively with the traditional approach to care, during the active mourning period.

Securing a lying in place denotes that the widow is ready for the initiation of relevant cultural rites. Thus, if roles are undertaken by an appropriate person and in a timely fashion, a clear direction is paved for the funeral ceremony. According to van Genneep, (1960) a clear direction for events during difficult time such as death of a family member is an important aspect in maintaining order and structure for the bereaved family

and supporting community. A structured and orderly funeral ceremony can enhance healing for grieving widows.

Lying-in—an Appropriate Action

Naturally, the spreading of the floor bed for the widow is a sign that the widow is being “authorized” to lie down in respect for and honor of her fallen husband. Hence, the third theme that emerged, and was common to all participants, was lying-in. widows described lying-in as “rightful” and the “only” thing reasonable to do in such circumstances. Culturally, a newly bereaved widow is expected to experience extreme weakness, if she is seen to be overly energetic she is subject to grave suspicion of having “done something” to her husband. Lying down in mourning by the newly widowed is communicating that “my hands are clean in his death.” This is driven by a strong and commonly held belief in Botswana and indeed most of Africa that death does not just happen, it is caused by somebody using mystical magic (Mbiti, 1989).

Nonetheless, experts in thanalogical studies confirm that bereaved persons experience physical weakness as one of the many symptoms associated with a significant loss. While on one hand this weakness is a culturally constructed, from the scientific point of view it is a proven fact. (Jeffreys, 2005; Worden 1982; 2002). Therefore, the physical support that is provided to the widow during the active mourning period is timely and an action worth undertaking.

Lying down was reported by widows to indicate the depth of pain and the degree of commitment in the marital relationship. By lying down, the new widow also expresses to her community that she is sharing the “pangs” of loss with them. As experts in death studies aptly put it, it is to convey a message that the life that was lived was valuable and

is now being celebrated (Canine, 1996; Krige, 1957; Wolfelt, n. d.). Some elderly participants in this study (Mabaka, Mama-T, & Reba) confirmed that lying down by the widow, following the death of a husband, signals self-respect and that of her community.

Reciprocally, by *lying-in* the widow invites sympathy and support from her community. Tebamo, a member of the second focus group declared that lying down was convenient for her in that as friends visited and chatted with her, her thoughts were momentarily diverted from her loss. Mama-T, a key informant, emphasized that culturally, it is unimaginable for a widow to be moving about freely when her better half is dead. Several participants from the second focus group indicated that the community would be alarmed by a widow who does not lie down in mourning following the death of her husband (e. g. Botlhale, Mogodi, Tebamo & Peggy). She can be subject to countless doubts and suspicions concerning the death of her husband from her community subsequently lose their respect.

I recall an incidence when one member from Focus Groups II, Koki, mentioning that for her lying down was depressing, and expressing that she would rather have been doing some duties around the house; there was dead silence in the room. A wave of strong oppositional energy from other participants was evident within this silence. This was vivid in the way that most widows turned their heads slowly towards Koki, as if saying: “what are you talking about...you never talk that way about cultural tradition.” This comment was followed by subtle arguments in defense of the need to lie down. This disposition displayed by participants clearly spoke of the high level of respect and sacredness of not only lying down, but all events surrounding the time of death.

As a professional counselor and the so-called “white-black” (common description of the elite), it taught me that we need to be more cautious about how and what we (counselors) say about traditional structures to clients. Based on the high level of confidence that participants revealed in this investigation concerning traditional structures, any seemingly unacceptable communication could repel clients from utilizing one of the invaluable human services—counseling.

Batswana, like most nations of Africa, believe that there is a continuous connecting force between the individual and the spiritual world (Chilisa, 2006; Mutwa, 1999; Some', 1999). In the context of this investigation, Mabaka, an elderly participant, stated that lying down by the widow following the death of her husband, is believed to help soften *his house* (the grave site of the deceased) during digging. Thus by lying down the woman requests “Mother Nature” to be kind and soften the ground for digging. I have on several occasions heard complaints from elders that the grave diggers reported being almost unable to “crack” the ground because the widow was behaving *sekgoa* (in a “white” way), causing the ground to be hard to dig. This is a cultural definition of events and one of the deeply buried beliefs held by most Batswana, and it appears that it will exist in their minds for a long time to come; thus, it needs to be paid more attention and respected during counseling interventions. Whilst the counseling intervention boasts of powerful conflict resolution strategies it would appear more reasonable if counselors supported the widow in observing the set cultural practices, rather than trying to find rationale for each practice. In this way, both counselors and the grieving widows can avoid conflicts with the larger community. The consolation would be that the widows can persevere lying down since it is a short-lived ceremony. Experience has it that the

ensuing conflict from disregarding cultural standards can last for all of her lifetime within a community.

A significant number of participants from both group discussions and key informants repeatedly mentioned that lying down following a husband's death is a behavior that was inherited from our forefathers—has always been that way, and should be maintained without question. Indeed this sounded like an immemorial response to difficult life situations such as death of a close family member, which provided answers and comfort to our forefathers. From participants' disposition, it appears as if this response will continue to be observed for countless years to come. The stance is confirmed by Mbiti (1989) when, describing the position of cultural tradition, mentioned that belief dies slower than practice and people will continue to hold onto their corpus of beliefs, despite the influence of modernization.

The Night Vigil

A fourth major theme concerned the activities of the night vigil which was described by a significant number of participants as evoking an assortment of feelings and great healing effects. Participants described with deep passion, the intensity of witnessing the arrival of the deceased body from the mortuary, activities of the wake service, and the actual burial. Letty, a younger widow said she got completely disconnected from all that was happening around her following the arrival of her husband's body; she was only brought to consciousness by the singing of the funeral dirges. She mentioned the soothing healing effect that she drew from the religious part of the night vigil, subsequently reconnecting to events taking place around her.

A significant number of participants appreciated the fact that despite all the pain, all these activities of the night vigil signaled the realness and finality of death, and they repeatedly said “there was nothing else to do,” possibly indicating acceptance of loss. Canine (1996) succinctly described the invaluable role of funerals to the bereaved when he said that they initiate acceptance of the loss. Acceptance of the loss, the first of the four task of mourning, is described as a necessary attitude for healing (Worden, 2002).

Acceptance of loss was influenced also by the religious activities of the wake service. Biblical verses that were read and the preaching of relevant sermons, during the night vigil were reported by widows as enhancing healing. The main form that the night vigil takes is that of a prayer service. Jeffreys (2005), states that “for many people who are grieving, feeling empty inside with no answers for their questions, their spiritual and religious beliefs assume tremendous importance” (p. 14). Botho shared that during the night vigil was the time that the devil would be trying to pull *you* away and God will be protecting you; indicating the omnipotence and holy presence of the Lord.

Conty attested to the healing effect she drew from the religious aspect of the wake service, when she said for her, she did not spend much thinking about her future as most widows indicated; she said she believed that the wake service was helping her husband to transition to His Father (in heaven) and felt very comforted that way. The healing aspect of scriptures is well described by Jeffreys (2005), when he states that religious beliefs have the potential for diminishing or even replacing the common fear of death.

Another soothing effect drawn from the activities of the night vigil is what participants described as tremendous support from the community; by coming to spend the whole night (awake) with the bereaved family. Mogodi exclaimed that if people could

“just dump the body and leave—it could kill you.” Hence the support, not only during the night vigil, but throughout all the entire funeral ceremony is perceived to be tantamount to a life-saving activity. Actually, in the *Setswana* culture, support in bereavement is termed *matshediso*, which connotes, “life-giving.” Hence, Batswana generally have confidence that they will be supported (receive *matshediso*) by their community in times of calamity.

Words of wisdom given by elders were reported also by widows to have helped them towards healing; Koki mentioned that some advice she heard during her husband’s wake service helped coin strategies that she applied when she encountered difficult situations after her husband’s death. As mentioned before, elders in Botswana are highly respected for their wisdom and counsel; as such in funeral ceremonies they head most activities as well as give advice and caution about possible incidents in the future (e. g. the ripple effects of loss). Therefore the night vigil, more than just being a prayer service also ensures multiple supports from the mourning community, specifically the elders.

It may be important to note that there were some participants who stressed that despite all the important messages and the support from the community they remained closed-up in their world of pain; the assumption is that they missed out on the invaluable healing mechanism inherent in various activities of the wake service. Confidante and Cathy members of Focus Group I, and Chedu a member of the second focus group, shared that they sank too deep in their pain of loss to connect psychologically to activities of the night vigil. The assumption is that these widows had pressing issues which needed to be addressed to counter the dampening of their interest for such an important undertaking. How can widows be assisted during the active mourning period to deal with

the most pressing psychological issues to pave a path towards healing? The answer can be found in the provision of awareness education sessions by counselors throughout the funeral ceremony, but with more focus on the most intense but also very important events, as described by participants. “Reconstruction of a grieving person’s life story, identities, and social meanings in the post-loss world is a critical part of the healing process” (Jeffreys, 2005, p. 61). Another question is the feasibility for grieving widows to construct narratives to live by when they are not able to recall important events surrounding the funeral.

Garbing—Maintaining a Spiritual Relationship with the Deceased

Bertman, (1999) reminds us that death ends a life and not a relationship. As a result, widows described being garbed with deep passion implying powerful meanings they construed thereof and the post-loss relationship that they needed to maintain by dressing in mourning attire. Maintaining a healthy relationship with the deceased promotes healing (Canine, 1996). Thus widows constructed narratives to live by, which are described by some writers and several grief experts as one of the important steps towards healing (Frankl, 1997, Jeffreys, 2005; Klass, 1996; Niemeyer 2001). A significant number of participants described dressing in mourning attire as a necessary sign of widowhood and being in a continuous relationship with their deceased husbands. Furthermore, widows said that being garbed indicated love and extended respect and honor to their deceased husbands. These widows constructed several an positive meanings from the deaths of their husbands, which helped them to accept their loss and move on with life.

As a sign of widowhood, garbing protects the widow and the community.

Participants mentioned that the mourning garb speaks of their status instantly to those who see them much more than words can say. Indicating the power inherent in the mourning garb, Botlhale mentioned that if a widowed woman would suddenly enter the room we were conducting the meeting in, everybody's demeanor would change, because we would know at an instant that "all is not well with her." "All not being well" could mean the hurt that she is going through or that she is a source of deadly pollutants. It will depend on what meaning each individual makes from a woman in mourning attire. To this, Tebamo shared that her friends knew at an instant that she was widowed by manner of her attire and did not make "foolish jokes" around her, but were more sympathetic with her. Mogodi simply said it differentiated her from the rest of the community, defining her as widow. Furthermore, Mogodi said that when she picked up the mourning dress she felt her soul melting away, because it confirmed her widowhood state. Same, a key informant, described this differentiation as a force that helped her accept her widowed state and look forward to life. It is assumed from participants' descriptions that the mourning garb brought the widows closer to the reality of death, which also is a positive step towards healing.

On the issue of protecting herself and the community, Mabaka cautioned that a woman in mourning garb avoids all confrontations and altercations as much as possible, and her demeanor is that of respecting her image and the community. The kind of respect alluded to here is observing cultural mores, failing which the widow can be scorned, ridiculed, or even ostracized by her community. In Mabaka's words, she should keep to herself as a way of containing the so-called lethal pollution. Due to the so-called lethal

substances that a widowed woman is supposedly emitting, men tacitly know that they have to maintain definable boundaries with her. To continue to draw respect from her community, the widow needs to observe these set cultural standards.

Conversely, when a woman is not garbed following the death of her husband, she brings unrelenting discomfort to her community. In Botlhale's words, the community will be presenting rhetorics like "is she not the one who just lost a husband; what is she up to?" These remarks are an expression of fear that she may pollute or transmit *boswagadi* to men specifically, by engaging in sexual relationships with them while they may not be aware of her widowhood status. It is possibly for this reason that widows are cautioned by elders not to adorn themselves in jewelry, nail polish, or skin bleaches, or apply any soothing ointment on their skin. Thus if a widow does not adorn herself or apply ointment in her skin, her skin will be dry and cracked, resulting in her not appealing to the opposite sex. Generally, the widow is expected to behave in a way that prevents "harm" to the community.

Dressed in mourning garb, the widow avoids large crowds and places of enjoyment. This still could be a way of containing pollution; however, large crowds constitute many different kinds of people with different behaviors, who could possibly say hurtful words to the widow. As much as it is a cultural expectation to stay indoors or avoiding large crowds, from a psychological point of view keeping to herself, the widow has time to delve into her loss, experience the pain of loss as well as reflect on it. This may not be possible if she always has people around her. Thus taking a closer look at her loss and her new status as a widow can enhance healing.

In relation to maintaining a spiritual connection with the deceased, most widows said that they did what they did to fulfill wishes that their husbands expressed in their life time. Chedu, who was not garbed in dark colors, said that it was what her husband had always wished for her to do. Chedu used *only* one dress throughout her mourning period, which she had on when her husband died. Symbolically, this was a powerful gesture of keeping memories of her late husband alive. In the event that the wishes of the dead are not respected, ancestors may be angered, consequently bringing punishment upon the family. In this way being garbed is done to honor the deceased, a personal gratification on the part of the widow, as well as to appease ancestors.

It is interesting that even for those participants who had the option not be garbed, took it upon themselves to be garbed. This could mean they indeed wanted to maintain a spiritual connection with their husbands and for others it could mean that they feared being viewed with skepticism the community regarding the deaths of their husbands.. Being dressed in mourning attire countered these attitudes being raised by their community. The concept of Symbolic interactionism teaches us that people create shared meanings through their interactions and those meanings become their reality (Patton, 2001). In the context of the culture of Batswana, the meaning that they have created primarily regarding widowhood is that the widow is a source of pollution. Consequently they act on the basis of this meaning, and can ostracize the widow based on this reality.

Whilst most widows were wholly embracing of being garbed; there some who viewed being garbed as some form of “social incarceration.” This view was evident Bongani and Botlhale—key informants who expressed that when they were “undressed” (from the mourning garb) they felt liberated. This denotes a strong cultural expectation

for a widowed woman to be garbed in mourning attire. Hence even those whom it did not appeal to, they may have just done it anyway for fear of being singled out for non-compliant with the social norm. This is not uncommon in the culture of Batswana. As much as widows had their own reasons for being garbed, there seems to be a huge societal pressure on them to be garbed. In view of these insights it could be assumed that being garbed may hinder healing to those widows who do not see the need to be dressed in mourning, but could have greater healing effects for those who construct the meaning of their life from this attire. Botlhale and Bongani mentioned that they felt restricted socially when garbed in mourning clothes, and felt “liberated” once “undressed” from the mourning clothes.

Burial—A Time to Realize the Truth (about death)

Participants described overwhelming feelings that they experienced at the burial of their husbands. A significant number of participants made comments like “having stiff knees,” “being out of my body,” “under a dark cloud,” and “feeling lost” in their usual residence. Several thanatological experts indicate that all these experiences are to be expected following a major loss (Bertman, 1999; Parkes, 1996; Worden, 2002). Disorientation in their usual residence was reported by widows as one of the uncomfortable feelings they encountered after the burial. These highlights lead us to reflect on van Manen’s (1997) “existential of lived space,” positing that the space we find ourselves in affects the way we feel. Thus, widows found themselves in a space of emptiness and sorrow. Educating widows on possible experiences following a significant loss can normalize their experiences and help them understand the effects of grief on the

body. Healing from grief may be delayed if widows do not understand the experiences they are going through following the loss of their husbands.

Cleansing and "Undressing"

The word *senyama* connotes darkness; Batswana would generally say a person is in "*darkness*" referring to a bereaved person. In view of this, "lighting of the house," sprinkling of treated water before opening the house are actions intended to counter the darkness, thus creating a "new dawn" for the widow. A "new dawn" is particularly visible also when the widow is bathed in traditional herbs and dressed up in a brand new set of clothes after removing her old mourning attire. These undertakings assist the widow further to come to terms with her loss and her widowhood status.

When we analyze activities such as burying old mourning clothes and dispensing the deceased's belongings, we begin to realize that they to assist the widow to achieve closure. To satisfy the concept "cleansing," the widow is treated with purging medicines as well as taking herb-treated baths to clean her blood and get rid of her late husband's vaporous shadow (*seriti*). Participants mentioned that they felt safe and that their lives were running smoothly due to undertaking the cleansing ritual. Being cleansed was a priority to widows in that, even those who had issues with their in-laws expressed deep gratitude when their in-laws conducted this final rite for them. The *seriti* and *senyama* imply a lifetime of bad luck and misfortune. Participants were well aware that they will remain widows for the rest of their lives, nothing can change this status, but none of them could live with *senyama* and *seriti* associated with not having been cleansed.

The cleansing ceremony is spearheaded by elders—the same elder who was the care giver during the lying-in period conducts the cleansing. All those widows who had a

complete cycle of events from the *lying-in* period to the cleansing ceremony expressed greater contentment with the entire funeral ceremony. The assumption is that this feeling of contentment can enhance healing from grief. Conty was one of the widows who had a complete cycle of events during mourning related her experience of care and support with much pleasantness. If the protocol is observed according to cultural standards (if elders are present and participate) healing for the grieving widow is enhanced.

An interesting turn of events was the declaration by one key informant that cultural rituals for her did not cure HIV/AIDS. She strongly advised widows that they should not place their hopes only on traditional structures; they need to consider alternative treatments. This has implications for how traditional and professional approaches to care for grieving widows could be combined. This was a powerful insight from an average citizen, who can be an invaluable asset in mobilizing her community.

As an average citizen, she can be better accepted by her community much more than a professional counselor. People in Botswana sometimes do not place much confidence in professionals, as they regard them as “white,” and upholding the “white” lifestyles. This insight also suggests that people can continue to submit to cultural structures, but should be aware of changes and other influences in their environment and take appropriate and life-saving actions.

Different Viewpoints

Some participants presented with different viewpoints regarding some traditional practices; such opinions are not surprising because each individual is unique and experiences life situations in her own way. There were obvious differences in life-styles, social positions, and degree of faith in the utility of traditional systems, which all need to

be considered by both counselors and the traditional care providers. Participants, who presented with these different viewpoints, lived in cities and had achieved a recognizable level of education according to educational standards within the country. They also lived in big cities amidst the influence of Western civilization, and thus their perception of events was influenced by many factors in their lives.

A broader approach to care is needed to encompass diverse needs and experiences of grieving widows by considering their lifestyles and system of beliefs. This can ensure care that is individually meaningful. These participants satisfied stereotypes prevailing in the country; that behaviors and the manner of thinking for “educated” people, living in cities are different from those who are “not educated” and living in rural settings. The question is; how then, is grief care standardized for people with different life experiences? This insight is a challenge to counselors to begin to design strategies of working with traditional care providers to ensure individualized grief care.

Counseling

All participants pointed out that they had no counseling interventions following the death of their husbands or any other time thereafter. Most of the participants indicated that they did not know what counseling was or the professionals who provided the service. It is not surprising that they spoke the way they did concerning counseling. First, most of the participants were average citizens who lived in smaller villages. Smaller villages usually have scanty essential services as compared to cities, big towns or bigger villages. It is obvious from the participants’ transcriptions that counseling was not available in their village, as revealed by their reports.

Secondly, the counseling service in Botswana can be described as at an infancy stage within the country and not yet known to many people, especially those living in the less densely populated areas of the country. In principle counseling was first introduced in the country in 1960s; but only became vibrant in the mid 1990s following the first case of HIV/AIDS, which was diagnosed in 1989. For this reason, counseling mainly focused on HIV/AIDS issues. Due to the stigma associated with HIV, people do not want to be associated with its services and may thus deny any knowledge about it. As it is practiced presently, counseling upholds the principles and lifestyles of the Western countries from which it was adopted. It is mainly for this reason that it is not popular and is viewed with doubts by many indigenous people in Botswana.

Having presented the reasons for a low recognition of counseling service, it is striking that in this era of HIV/AIDS in Botswana, there are people who are not aware of the counseling service and its potential benefits. Day-to-day in Botswana, the media, tribal gatherings at *kgotla* and in schools, counseling is always one of the points in the agenda. It becomes difficult to appreciate that there would be somebody who has not heard about counseling. Experience has taught me that at times people say they do not know of a program, meaning that they are not interested in its objectives. Is it possible that these widows could have distanced themselves from having any knowledge about counseling because it did not appeal to them? One wonders if participants are even aware that the same basic principles that are applied in HIV counseling can still be applied in grief counseling. In any case, professional counselors need not only publicize the service but to re-design its approach to suit the lifestyle and belief systems of indigenous people. Counseling is a research-based talk therapy which can benefit many Batswana; the nation

of Botswana has suffered unrelenting numbers of deaths of young people from HIV/AIDS and many other causes of death in the country more than ever before in her history. As a talk therapy, counseling can help the bereaved to talk and feel through their experiences in order to be able to move forward in life and also to achieve and maintain a healthy mental status.

Recommendations to Policy Makers

All participants presented very strong opinions regarding the utility of traditional systems not only following the death of a husband, but also in the daily lives of Batswana. Participants presented powerful and deeply buried beliefs concerning lethal ailments associated with death, which they said are countered by the observance of cultural rituals. Participants expressed an immeasurable and an extremely high level of confidence in the healing mechanism inherent in cultural rituals. They stressed the importance of undertaking traditional treatment, saying it prevented ailments that, if contracted, could no longer be effectively treated. Additionally, traditional treatment also, as reported by widows, prevented possible *boswagadi*, which is believed to be harbored by a widowed woman who has not undergone traditional treatment. Widows emphasized that cultural tradition should be maintained, specifically for these reasons.

Widows repeatedly emphasized that, the traditional culture must not be allowed to die and should be passed down from one generation to the other, to ensure its perpetuation. Widows recommended that transmission of cultural knowledge should be enhanced through the national media, the Botswana television and radio stations within the country. Due to the long-standing legacy of the colonizers, the radio and television

stations in Botswana uphold lifestyles of other cultures and those of colonizers, thus slots for cultural tradition are still very limited in these media arenas.

A powerful comment from a group member (Botho), addressed the issue of young people dying in large numbers due to HIV/AIDS more than ever before in contemporary Botswana, because cultural tradition is generally ignored in the daily lives of Batswana. To some extent this statement is true because in the past both girls and boys were educated traditionally regarding proper and responsible sexual behavior, which is no longer the case these days. The youth in Botswana “plunge blindly” into sexual activity without prior knowledge of the dangers of uninformed sexual activity or the benefits of responsible sexual behavior. Currently, in Botswana, information on sexual and reproductive health is left to teachers who are not prepared accordingly to impart this knowledge. The Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA), an affiliate of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) offers programs on sexual and reproductive health to the youth, but only to a limited extent due to financial and human resource constraints.

Additionally, sexual matters remain taboo subjects culturally so that many people, including teachers, are uncomfortable imparting this knowledge or succinctly present it. Elders, who disseminated this knowledge in the past, have been relegated to the periphery; chaos and confusion has taken over, as evidenced by humongous numbers of HIV/AIDS deaths and infections, as well as what are commonly termed ‘passion or love killings,’ referring to homicide-suicide cases of lovers.

A significant number of widows expressed that cultural tradition should be observed just as a *modus operandi* and should not be questioned at all. Finding rationale

for traditional practices can dilute meaning and potency associated with these structures. Moreover issues concerning traditional culture cannot be questioned for fear of upsetting elders, and subsequently, ancestors. The elders are considered the “go-betweens” among survivors and ancestors. Most cultural rituals are undertaken to appease ancestors, which is the major reason they are performed flawlessly and treated with such extreme sacredness.

A bright idea of conducting country-wide seminars on cultural tradition was suggested by one key informant–Bongani. If this idea could be employed, it can help indigenous people suggest what they need and how information concerning cultural structures could be handled, instead of merely imposing ideas or programs on them, which, in a majority of cases, has yielded futile results. Involving the concerned masses would ensure ownership and sustenance of community programs. This is an invaluable insight, in view of the fact that cultural tradition, the “backbone of life” for most Batswana, is slowly disappearing and there are no strategies in place to revive these “life-sustaining” structures. Professionals in Botswana need to initiate social discourse concerning cultural tradition to ensure its sustenance and availability for those people who may need its utility in their lives.

Hypotheses Generated from the Investigation

One major aim of conducting a qualitative research study is to generate hypotheses. A number of hypotheses emerged from the findings of this study. Hypotheses that emerged directly from the study include the following:

(a) When traditional rituals are performed in a timely manner and by designated elders, they enhance healing in widows. If the traditional protocol is not observed as expected

during the undertaking of traditional rituals it bring hurt and confusion, not only to the bereaved widow but her mourning community as well.

(b) A collaborative effort to care giving, by both the traditional and professional (counselors) service providers can benefit grieving widows in Botswana, specifically during the active mourning period and can also ensure comprehensive grief care that is culturally appropriate and is considerate of the client's belief system and lifestyle.

(c) Western formal education has some significant influence on the thinking, feeling, and behavior of an indigenous *Motswana*, regarding his or her involvement in traditional practices?

d) In the culture of Botswana, within which there is a strong belief regarding the "unseen forces" of the universe; no widow of indigenous origin can undergo her husband's death ceremony without undertaking even the mildest form of ritual.

e) It is anticipated that Botswana will respond positively to the introduction of cultural tradition in the school system, counseling, counselor education, and supervision programs.

Recommendations and Implications

A number of recommendations for future research and implications for counseling emerged from the findings of this investigation. The need for integrating the traditional and professional approaches in providing care to grieving widows was illuminated through this study. A central question for the investigation was how do widows in Botswana experience the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement as they mourn the death of their husbands? A subsidiary question sought to find out what aspects of rituals enhanced or hindered healing in widows during

mourning? Another question that had direct implications for counseling was; how can knowledge and insights gained from the findings of this investigation begin to inform culturally appropriate and sensitive psychosocial interventions? Other questions included are: How can the counseling service be publicized and made accessible to all citizens in the country, specifically those who live in the outskirts of urban areas? How can professional counselors begin to include traditional approaches in professional counseling interventions during the widow's active mourning period? These questions as well as the major research questions lead to the following recommendations: (a) Awareness and sensitization seminars regarding the counseling service, (b) Developing a widow-to-widow support program, (c) Policy formulation regarding cultural tradition, (d) Integration of traditional and professional approaches in providing care to grieving widows, (e) Culturally oriented curriculum for counselor education and supervision programs, (f) Culturally oriented education curricula, (g) The need for more research and documentation regarding traditional culture and the counseling service within Botswana.

Awareness and Sensitization Seminars on Counseling

The findings of this study revealed that widows who lived in rural settings had no idea of what counseling is or what it entails. However, for those widows who resided in cities or big villages had a vague idea about counseling service. Drawing from this insight, I submit that countrywide seminars and workshops be conducted to educate citizens about counseling and its value in human lives. A suitable forum for disseminating such information would be the tribal *kgotla* (court) meeting, the place where local citizens feel safe and are allowed freedom of expression as a community. Hence there is a popular *Setswana* (pertaining to the people and the country-Botswana),

saying which is; “*mmualebe o a bo a bua la gagwe*”- when literally translated to English means “whatever idea a person presents, it is his or her opinion.” The *kgotla* is specifically selected because it is a forum for local people and assures them power and authority to decide what they need for their community.

Another way of disseminating information about counseling and grief care would be through seeking a presentation slot in a Parliamentary Sitting, the House of Chiefs, and a Full Council Meeting for all the country’s district councils. These meetings consist of the country’s political leaders who live within their electoral communities and are aware of their constituents’ needs on a daily basis. These leaders share information gained at meetings with their communities and together decide on implementing services.

Widow-to-Widow Support Program

During both focus group discussions, a number of widows shared that they found solace and comfort in discussing their concerns with other widows when they felt perturbed and down-hearted due to grief. Considering this finding, an idea that came to mind was to utilize the widows as lay grief counselors to function within their communities. Having been widowed, these women are now considered elders and experts in the arena of grief. The idea of training lay grief counselors can also be presented at the forums mentioned above (e.g. Parliamentary Sitting, House of Chiefs and Full Council Meeting), then it can be implemented at local level if affirmed by community leaders.

Communities in Botswana have highly regarded persons who have earned respect within their communities through exceptional service provision. These people usually represent their community in important forums. Therefore, to ensure a culturally appropriate and sensitive service, the opinionated community members need to be

involved in decision making on matters that concern their communities from the very beginning of a program—any program, through implementation and beyond, to the evaluation phase. Such community involvement strategies can ensure program acceptance as well as its sustenance. Most programs within the country have not yielded anticipated results because they were merely imposed on communities without prior consultation and involvement of the concerned masses. Involving the masses can ensure a design and ownership of a program that is acceptable and meaningful to them.

Policy Formulation

There is a National Policy on Culture (2001) that is already in place within the country, from which ideas and insights can be drawn for implementing counseling programs by the counseling professionals. The policy has helpful insights into the inclusion of traditional culture in the professional counseling intervention, counselor education and supervision, as well as the entire educational system in the country. Counselors, counselor educators, and counselor supervisors in Botswana need to be conversant with the policy's principles, and then begin to select those aspects of the policy that closely relate to professional counseling, and design operational objectives that can guide integration of the traditional and professional approaches to grief care. The counselor education and supervision programs should consider offering courses concerning death, loss, grief, and bereavement, as well as grief and bereavement counseling. Death is taboo communication in Botswana, which not only counselors, but average citizens need to learn to discuss openly, as it now affects Botswana more than ever before in the history of their country.

Culture-Oriented Counselor Education and Supervision Programs

The counselor education and supervision programs should begin to include traditional structures, knowledge, practices, and belief systems of the local people into the curricula. Special attention should be paid to the meanings derived from these indigenous structures, as well as the healing mechanism therein. Since most counselors were trained through the Western prepared modules, they may not have sufficient knowledge and skill to provide appropriate information regarding traditional culture and structures. Even if they possessed the knowledge, they may not be ready to handle cultural matters which are viewed as inferior in social and academic circles, and also regarded as “a thing of the past.”

With this awareness in mind, elders can be invited to share information about cultural tradition with students; this will also enhance their (elders and traditional structures) authority as bearers and custodians of indigenous knowledge. Elders in Botswana are very protective of cultural knowledge and need to be convinced respectfully to impart such knowledge to ensure its perpetuation. Some of the cultural structures in Botswana are gradually disappearing because people could not relate to or understand the meanings associated with them, particularly the society’s elite. Yet there are resourceful elders that can help sustain this heritage.

It is my strong assumption that, if the traditional structures can be recognized by the society’s elite, they can gain popularity among civil servants as well as average citizens in the country. People of Botswana place a high level of respect on their scholars: such remarks as, “if the educated can do it, who are you not to do it” are commonplace in Botswana. Thus, recognized and respected by the elite, traditional structures would be

utilized by average citizens with much greater ease. The high level of respect placed on the society's elite is still the legacy of the colonizers, but can be applied positively in the present era for the benefit of indigenous masses.

One advantage of involving elders in counselor education and supervision programs, is that they can highlight some of the deeper meanings associated with the nature and actual performances of rituals, including the healing mechanism therein. If professional counselors are conversant with meanings and healing mechanisms inherent in rituals, they can appropriately address the needs of those clients who submit to these structures. The bearers of cultural knowledge and traditional structures have always been relegated to a lower social position, or to the past. Yet these systems are a powerful force in the lives of many indigenous Batswana. Involving elders can help put both counseling intervention and cultural tradition in the limelight and assure a sustainable collaboration of the two approaches of providing care to grieving widows. Most importantly it can ensure an appropriate, sensitive and comprehensive service for grieving widows.

One important approach to ensure the inclusion of the traditional culture in counselor education and supervision programs is to assign counselor trainees to observe the various cultural ceremonies in the country, note the meanings and the healing mechanism inherent in these traditional performances, and reflect on the implications they hold for counseling. This could be done as part of the practicum or internship experience for counselor trainees. Special discussion forums on the implications of cultural beliefs for counseling can be integrated into counselor supervision sessions. Research projects also can be conducted by counselor trainees, which can highlight the value, healing power and meanings inherent in these cultural practices. In this way,

indigenous counselor trainees can gain new knowledge and insights about their cultural tradition and begin to embrace and perpetuate their cultural heritage, which is slowly disappearing.

Counselor trainees, counselor educators, and supervisors need to be aware of the effect of their own cultural biases on client-service provision (Arredondo, 1999). Some of these biases are the legacy of the colonizers that has remained to control the thinking, feeling, and behavior of Batswana several decades after the colonial masters left the country. Seminars and workshops that address the importance of culture in relation to client intervention can improve counselor awareness regarding the role of cultural tradition in the lives of indigenous people. A conference for counselors in Southern Africa on the 'Effects of Colonization on Africa's Culture' can be one forum that can help to deliver the minds of counselors from the old inferior and derogatory way of thinking about one's own lifestyle, an attitude inherited from the colonizers, which is rife in the minds of not only Batswana but many other nations of Africa that experienced imperial rule.

Another topic that can be included in counselor training programs is African Psychology; (e.g. the African view of disease and causes of death; as well as the influence of the "invisible forces" of the universe). This awareness can help counselors perceive and understand the world from the client's point of view, enabling them to provide a service that resonates with the mindset of a *Motswana* or an African. The subject, "functions of traditional rituals in indigenous people's lives," can be well suited within the topic regarding African Psychology. In this way, an appropriate and sensitive curriculum will be availed and can help new counselors meet clients where they are. The

assumption is that the served population can begin accepting the counseling service, as well as developing more confidence in its services.

Culture-Oriented Education Curricula

There is a popular saying in the *Setswana* language which says “*lo ojwa lo sale metse;*” when literally translated to English it means that “bend it (a stick) while it is still wet” which is equivalent to an English saying that “you cannot teach an old dog new tricks.” What I am leading to by this adage is that the whole country’s educational curriculum needs to be re-designed to include traditional culture, knowledge, practices, and beliefs from the earliest years of schooling; a time when the young minds are still free from potentially influential forces in their environment, thus “catching them while young”(Ngugi, 1998). This is applying the same strategy that was employed by missionaries to “civilize” Africa.

During the pre-school years, a period commonly referred to as nursery in Botswana, cultural tradition can be introduced simultaneously with basic reading and writing skills. If these concepts are introduced to these young minds, we may ensure a lifetime of commitment and embracing of traditional culture. When missionaries introduced Christianity they used the young innocent school children to strip them (*Batswana and most Africans*) of their heritage. A similar strategy can be employed currently to reverse the mind-set of the *Motswana* or African child, and assist him/her to reclaim what he/she lost during the colonial era regarding their indigenous traditional structures and practices.

The teaching of traditional culture should not end at the pre-school age, but should be taken up in all the school years, so that even at university level indigenous

scholars can make rational and informed decisions about the utility of traditional structures and practices. Currently, most people who look down upon their culture seem to lack accurate knowledge about these structures; the meanings they hold and the healing power inherent in them. These people are only blindly emulating attitudes of missionaries; perceiving themselves as a better people. A culturally-oriented curriculum can counter most of the negative thinking harbored by natives concerning their traditional lifestyle. Another important point to consider would be to delineate cultural practices from witchcraft, which have always been “covered under one blanket” by the colonial masters. They commonly referred to the indigenous traditional healers “witch doctors.”

Integration of Services—Traditional and Professional

The operational objectives that can be drawn from the National Policy on Culture (2001) can guide the inclusion of cultural tradition into counseling interventions, education and supervision. It has been revealed in the results of this inquiry that there were gaps in provision of care to grieving widows when the performance of cultural rituals was undertaken in absence of the counseling intervention. A collaborative move by the two approaches can fill in the gaps and ensure comprehensive care to grieving widows. The specific gaps that were evident in the participants’ transcripts relate to some of the issues that widows encountered during mourning, which were either ignored or not addressed because they did not fit into the traditional approach to care. A discourse is overdue between the traditional and professional care providers and needs to be set to enable the integration of the two care-giving approaches for bereaved widows. The mixing of these approaches will ensure that widows’ concerns are addressed from a broader angle.

Without advocating for one service over the other, it is important to note that the counseling approach, even though (seemingly) highly recognized in the official circles, is not known to most rural area dwellers. As evident in this study, participants who lived proximal to the city had *some* idea of what counseling entails, but those who lived in remote areas of the country had no idea of what counseling was about.

Moreover, among those who know of it, counseling continues to struggle for recognition and acceptance. Many people in Botswana view counseling with some suspicion since it upholds the Western lifestyle, specifically individualism and confidentiality which is a contrast to the lifestyle of Botswana. Botswana are community-oriented and share a lot of things in common, from happiness to sorrow. The community-oriented attitude should always be considered when providing client care. A collaboration of the traditional and the professional approach to care can assist counselors in promoting people's lifestyles during service provision. Specifically, the counseling profession can gain more recognition in the country and, hopefully, be available also to all citizens in country who may need its utility.

Research Studies and Documentation

Traditional Culture and Documentation

More research studies on the traditional culture of Botswana are necessary; not only as a way of generating new knowledge, but to ensure authentic documentation that can be used for reference. Botswana's history regarding traditional life is fraught with derogatory messages left behind by Christian missionaries. There are limited studies that have been undertaken in Botswana on cultural tradition and practice, especially studies that do not view cultural tradition as inferior and or a 'thing of the past.'

A replicate study of the experiences of widows in Botswana in relation to the performance of rituals of death, loss, grief, and bereavement needs to be undertaken with the society's elite to triangulate results against those obtained in the present study. Most participants in this investigation were elementary school graduates who religiously embraced cultural rituals as compared with those who had high school diplomas and tertiary level education. The more educated group questioned a number of traditional practices and at times clearly stated that some of these practices were totally opposed to their belief system.

Botswana is a multi-ethnic society of about 26 tribes who have different ways of responding to problems in their lives (Chilisa, 2005). However, there are more similarities in responding to death than differences within this diversity. With this insight in mind, a document about the cultural response to death of Botswana can be assembled and can be a resourceful reference for both citizens and those interested in knowing more about this people. It can also be used as a text in schools given that in this investigation, I advocate for a culture-oriented curriculum for schools, counselor education, and supervision.

The availability of documented cultural standards would specifically counter the derogatory notations that were left behind by missionaries regarding the culture of Botswana, and indeed all Africans, during the colonial sovereignty. These demeaning records produced by missionaries have severely affected the thinking, behaviors, and the general outlook of many Botswana and many more Africans, in relation to their traditional culture, practices, and beliefs. Documentation of cultural standards can help indigenous people of Botswana, and in time, all of Africa, to develop a new

understanding and perspective of their cultural heritage and begin to deliberately make efforts to reclaim it.

Counseling

The counseling service is still at what could well be described as at infancy stage and as such its effectiveness with clientele in Botswana is not known. Several studies regarding the effectiveness of the counseling intervention and actual experiences of clients with service provision need to be conducted in Botswana to ensure successful and sustainable service provision.

Conclusion

The study revealed that Batswana live together as a community and support each other in difficult times. This confirms that indeed Batswana are a “just and caring nation” as envisioned by one of the six pillars of Botswana’s *Vision 2016*. Batswana uphold also the element of *botho* or humane behavior, thus there is a common saying, “*motho ke motho ka batho*,” which means that an individual survives (difficult times) because of (support) of others (Vision 2016 Council, 2004).

Batswana are a traditional nation; widows in this study revealed a very high level of trust in traditional structures, to the extent that they believed if they did not observe cultural tradition their lives would be in jeopardy. The amount of trust and level of respect placed on cultural rituals were also revealed by the manner in which rituals were said to have been conducted: flawlessly, and by the elderly. Additionally, it was evident from the findings of this study that a widowed woman is expected to undergo cultural rituals to respect the social order and to protect the public from lethal substances

associated with the death of a husband, supposedly being emitted by the uncleansed widow.

Although people may not religiously observe all of the cultural rituals, it became clear through discussions with the widows that very few people of indigenous origin, if any, could undergo a death ceremony without the mildest form of ritual. This derives from a commonly held and strong belief associated with mystical magic, of which many people in Botswana are tacitly and “vigilantly” aware in their day-to-day lives. As much as it appeared to be a personal choice to undertake cultural rituals, it has deeper connotations of being a social mandate, based on the attitudes that Batswana harbor against a widow who may not undertake cultural rituals following the death of her husband. Based on the claim that belief dies slower than practice (Mbiti, 1989) it can be assumed that the belief that guides Batswana’s behavior towards a widowed woman (the perception of the widow as a source of pollution) will remain rife in the minds of many Batswana for many years to come. Generally speaking, cultural rituals of death help the bereaved to discover the context of meaning for their lives and heal from their loss.

As much as cultural rituals are believed to boast a powerful healing mechanism, this investigation found that if rituals are performed in the absence of a complimentary service like counseling, they fell short of addressing most of the pressing problems of grieving widows. Participants revealed that they had issues that did not fall under the realm of cultural rituals, which were subsequently not addressed. As such, the care of grieving widows became fragmented. These insights call for a combination of the traditional and professional approaches to care, which should be employed simultaneously during the active mourning period when widows experience an

assortment of problems. These insights provide answers to the research question, how can knowledge and insights gained from the results of this study begin to inform culturally appropriate and responsive psychosocial interventions?

The position of the counseling service was clearly delineated by the results of this investigation, indicating a need for forceful efforts to help the service gain clout and popularity within the country. It was clear that if counseling service was made available it would open various avenues for many other supportive services that widows needed (e.g. legal and social welfare). It is of critical importance that counselors in Botswana begin to re-design the provision of counseling service, training and supervision programs to suit the lifestyle and the socio-economic status of citizens. Elders need to be consulted for cultural knowledge and wisdom, as human resources and custodians of cultural wealth and historical knowledge. Botswana's scholars need to begin research studies regarding traditional culture for future reference and specifically to ensure authentic records about lifestyles of indigenous *Motswana* and indeed all Africans of indigenous origin.

References

- African Religious forum (2005). *The African concept of death, the African concept of the afterlife*. Retrieved Jan 9, 2007, from: <http://www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/African-Religion.html>.
- Aanstoos, C., Fischer, W. F., Giorgi, A., & Wertz, F. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Ainsworth, M. D. S., Blehar, M. C., Waters, E., & Wall, S. (1978). *Patterns of attachment: A psychological study of the strange situation*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Alexander, J. J. (2003). The smudging and blessing pack: Inspirational rituals to cleanse and heal. Retrieved February 22, 2006, from: <http://anthropology.uwaterloo/courses/Anth311/Death%20Rituasl.htm>.
- Arbuckle, G. A. (1991). Communicating through ritual. *Human development*, 9 (2), 21-26.
- Archer, J. (1999). The nature of grief: *The evolution and psychology of reactions to loss*. London: Routledge
- Arredondo, P. (1999). Multicultural counseling competencies as tools to address oppression and racism. *Journal of Counseling and development*, (77), 102-108.
- Bertman, S. L. (1991). *Facing death: images, insights and interventions*. Boston: Taylor & Francis.
- Bhusumane, D. B. (2007). Examining the ways and extent to which counselors in Botswana are utilizing indigenous cultural practices and structures (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University, 2007). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 68 (06). (UMI No. 3273231)
- Boateng, F. (1990). Combating deculturalization of the African-American child in the public school system: A multi-cultural approach. In F. Lomotey (Ed.), *Going to school: the African-American experience*, (pp.73-84). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Boemmel, J., & Briscoe, J. (2001) *Web quest project fact sheet of Urie Bronfenbrenner*. National-Louis University.
- Bowlby, J. (1969). *Attachment and loss: (Vol. 1) Attachment*. New York: basic Books, Inc., Publishers.

- Bowlby, J. (1973). *Attachment and loss. (Vol. II). Separation, anxiety and anger*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Booi, L. (2006). Botswana's legal system and legal research. Retrieved June 29, 2008, from: <http://www.nyulawglobal.org/Globalex/Botswana.htm>.
- Brehn, S. S., Kassim, S. M., & Fein, Steve (2002) (5th Ed.). *Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005). *Making human being human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development; Experiences by nature and design*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Chilisa, B. (2005). Educational research within postcolonial Africa: A critique of HIV/AIDS research in Botswana. *International journal of qualitative studies in education*, 18 (6), 659-684.
- Caine, L. (1988). *Being a widow*. New York: Arbor House.
- Camic, P., Rhodes, J. E., & Yardley, L. (Eds.). (2003). *Qualitative research in psychology: Expanding methodology and design*. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Canine, J. (1996). *Understanding grief: Helping yourself heal*. New Jersey: Routledge.
- Collins, B., & Collins, T. M. (2005). *Crisis and trauma: Developmental-ecological intervention*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Coombs, R. H. (2005). *Family therapy review: Preparing for comprehensive and licensing examinations*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Corey, M. S., & Corey, G. (2006). *Groups: Process and practice*. Belmont CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Creswell, J. W. (1997). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Denbow, J. R., & Thebe, P. C. (2006). *Culture and customs of Botswana*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

- Denzin, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Dixon, Bob. (1977). *Catching them young: Sex, race, and class in children's fiction*. London: Pluto Press Limited.
- Doty, W. G. (1986). *Mythography: The study of myths and rituals*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Dreyer, K. (1979). *An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Druckman, D. (2004). *Doing Research: methods of inquiry for conflict analysis*. Thousand Oaks; SAGE Publications.
- Egan, G. (2004). *The skilled helper: a problem management and opportunity approach to helping*. London: Brookes/Cole Publishing Company.
- Frantz, F. (1952). *Black skins white masks*. New York: Grove Press Inc.
- Frazer, D. (1970). *Winning a primitive people*. Westport: Negro Universities Press.
- Flick, U. (1998). *An introduction to qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks; SAGE Publications.
- Frankl, V. (1992). *Man's search for meaning*. Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Freud, S. (1957). *Mourning and melancholia (standard ed., Vol. XIV)*. London: Hogarth (original published in 1917).
- Friesen, J. F. (1990). Rituals and family strength: *Spring* 19, (1), 39-48.
- Galgianaitis, C. (2005). *The lessons of loss: Between Sundays*. Retrieved Jan 2, 2006, from: <http://www.uua.org/clf/betweensundays/earlychildhood/LessonsLoss.html>.
- Gann, L. H., & Duinam C. (1969). *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960: The history of politics of colonialism, 1870-1914*. (Vol. 1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers.
- Giorgi, A. (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

- Glasser, W. (2002). *Counseling with choice theory*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Gluckman, M. (1966). "Les Rites of Passages." *In essays on the ritual of social relations* (Ed.), 1-52. Manchester University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1960). *Asylums*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Green, E. C., & Honwana (1999). Indigenous healing of war-affected children in Africa. *IK Notes*, 10; Washington D. C. Africa's Region's Knowledge and Learning Centre.
- Harms, L. (2005). *Understanding human development: A multi dimensional approach*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Harvey, J. H., & Miller, E. D. (2000). (Eds.). *Loss and trauma: General and close relationship perspectives*. Philadelphia: Brunner & Routledge.
- Hertz, R. (1960). *Death and the right hand*. (R. Needham & C. Needham, Trans.). New York: Free Press.
- Hoang, D. T. (2000). *Death rituals in Vietnamese society*. Retrieved Feb 2, 2006, from: http://healthlinks.washington.edu/ethnomed/culture/vietnamese/viet_death.html.
- Hotep, U. (n. d.). Decolonizing the African mind: further analysis and strategy. Retrieved January 23, 2008, from http://www.nbfront.org/html/FRONTalView/ArticlesPapers/Hotep_Decolonizing_African...
- James, J. W., & Cherry, F. (1988). *The grief recovery handbook: A step-by-step program for moving beyond loss*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.
- Jeffreys, J. S. (2005). *Helping grieving people--when tears are not enough. A handbook for care providers*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Kilonzo, G. P., & Hogan, N. M. (1999). Traditional mourning practices are abridged in response to the AIDS epidemic: Implications for mental health. *Transcultural psychiatry* 36 (3), 259-283.
- Klass, D. (1996). The deceased child in the psychic social worlds of bereaved parents during the resolution of grief. *In D. Klass, P. Silverman, and S. Nickman (Eds.), Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief (pp. 199-216)*. Washington DC: Taylor and Francis.
- Krige, E. J. (1957). *The social system of the Zulus*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.

- Krueger, R. A. (1979). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Krueger, R. A. (n. d.). *Telephone focus groups*. Retrieved April 28, 2008, from: http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus_tfg.html.
- Kruger, D. (1979). *An introduction to phenomenological psychology*. Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne University Press.
- Kopala, M., & Suzuki, L. A. (Eds.). (1999). *Using qualitative methods in psychology*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Kubler-Ross, E. (1969). *On death and dying: What families have to teach doctors, nurses, clergy, and their own families*. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Levers, L. L. (2004). An ethnographic analysis of traditional healing in Southern Africa: indigenous knowledge, cross-cultural implications, and HIV/AIDS. A paper presented at "One People, multiple dreams of a different World conference." Jinja, Uganda 7-13 June 2004.
- Levers, L. L. (2006). Samples of indigenous healing: The path to good medicine. *International journal of disability, development, and education*, 53 (4) 479-488.
- Levers, L. L. (2006a). Identifying psycho educational HIV/AIDS interventions in Botswana: Focus Groups and related rapid assessments methods. In C. Fischer (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods for psychological professions*. (pp.377-410). New York: Elsevier Press.
- Levers, L. L. (2006b). Traditional healing as indigenous knowledge: Its relevance to HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa and the implications for counselors. *Journal of Psychology in Africa*. (1), 87-100.
- Levers, L. L. & Maki D. R. (1994). An ethnographic analysis of traditional healing and rehabilitation services in Southern Africa: Cross-cultural implications. A project of the National Institute of Disability and Rehabilitation Research. World Rehabilitation Fund: University of New Hampshire.
- Maes, W. (1995). Training in guidance and counseling in Botswana. Ministry of Education, Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation, Basic Education Consolidation project. A joint project by the Ministry of Education and USAID, July 1995, Author.
- Malinowski, B. (1945). *The dynamics if culture change: and inquiry into race relations in Africa*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Mapp-Robinson, Z. (1987). Guidance and counselling programme implementation in the schools of Botswana: A report of a consultancy prepared for the Ministry of Education, Botswana. Author.
- Mazrui, A. A. (1986). *The Africans: A triple heritage*. Boston: Little and Brown Company.
- Marvasti, A. B. (2004). *Qualitative research in psychology*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- Mbano, N., & Komba, D. (1983). *Death and the hereafter among the Wamatengo and Wanyasa of Tanzania*. Field Report, Benedictine Seminary, Peramiho: Tanzania.
- Middleton, J. (1966). *The Lugbara of Uganda*. New York: Rinehart & Winston.
- Millar, D. (2004). Interfacing two knowledge systems: Local and science in Africa. Paper for Compas panel in the conference; Bridging scales and epistemologies-Linking local knowledge with global science in multi scale assessments. Centre for cosmovision and indigenous knowledge, Ghana. Retrieved May, 2007, from: <http://milleniumassessement.org/documents/bridging/papers/millar.david.pdf>.
- Miller, P. J., Hengst, J. A., & Wang, S. (2003). Ethnographic methods: Applications from developmental cultural psychology. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology and design*, (pp 219-242). Washington D. C.: American Psychological Association.
- Mbiti, J. S. (1989). *African philosophy* (2nd Ed.). Oxford: Heinemann.
- Merriam, B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from Case study research in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam-Webster collegiate dictionary (2003). (11th ed.). Springfield MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.
- Mutwa, V. C. (1999). *Indaba, my children: African folk tales*. New York: Grove Press.
- Nadeau, J. W. (2001). Meaning making in family bereavement. In M. A. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Shunt (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: consequences, coping, and care* (pp329-348).
- Niemeyer, R. A. (Ed.). (2001). *Meaning construction and the experience of loss*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Ngugi Wa Thiongo (1986). *Decolonizing the mind: the politics of language in African literature*. Nairobi: Heinemann.

- Nobles, W. (1986). *African psychology: Towards its reclamation, revitalization and reascension*. Oakland, CA: Black Family Institute.
- Nwoye, A. (2005). *Memory healing processes and community intervention in grief work in Africa*. *ANZJFT* (26) 3, 147-154.
- Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. (3rd. ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- People Living With Cancer (2005). *Understanding grief within a cultural context*. Retrieved November 26, 2006, from; [http://www.plwc.org/plwc/MainConstructor/ 1, 1744, 12-001237-00 14-understanding...](http://www.plwc.org/plwc/MainConstructor/1,1744,12-001237-00_14-understanding...)
- Parkes, M. C. (1996). *Bereavement: studies of grief in adult life*. Philadelphia: Taylor & Francis.
- Parsons, N. (1998). *King Khama, Emperor Joe and the great White Queen: Victorian Britain through African eyes*. Chicago: the University of Chicago Press.
- Pecorino, P. A. (2002). Death ritual: Anthropological perspectives Milton Cohen. Retrieved February 6, 2005, from: <http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/pecorip/SCCCWEB/ETEXTS/DeathandDying/TEXT/Cohen...>
- Pedersen, P. B. (1987). Ten frequent assumptions of cultural bias in counseling. *Journal of multicultural counseling and development*, 15: 16-22.
- Pemberton, (n. d.). Divination in Sub-Saharan Africa. Retrieved March 30, 2007, from: <http://metromuseum.org/explore/oracle/essay/Pemberton.html>.
- Polit, D., F. & Hungler, B. P. (1996). (4th Ed). *Essentials of nursing research. Methods, appraisal and utilization*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Randall, K. (2004). *The importance of rituals in bereavement*. Retrieved March 29, 2006, from (http://willowhouse.org/news_old/springs04.htm).
- Rando, T. (1984). *Grief, dying and death: Clinical interventions for caregivers*. Champaign, IL: Research Press Company.
- Republic of Botswana (2001). National policy on culture. Department of Culture and Youth, Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs. Government Printer, Gaborone. Author.
- Rosenblatt, P. C., Walsh, R., & Jackson, A. (1976). *Grief and mourning in cross cultural perspectives*. New Haven, CT: Human Relationships Area File Press.

- Rosenblatt, P. C. (2001). A social constructionist perspective on cultural differences in grief. In M. A. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Shunt (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: consequences, coping, and care* (pp.285-300). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Salole, G. (1992). *Building on people's strengths: The case of contextual child development*: Studies and Evaluation papers 5. Bernard Van Leer Foundation, The Hague.
- Shaver, P. R., & Tancredy, C. M. (2001). Emotion, attachment, and bereavement: A conceptual commentary. In M. A. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Shunt (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: consequences, coping, and care* (pp.285-300). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data; Methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction*. London: Sage Publications.
- Silverman, P. R. (2004). *Widow to widow: How the bereaved help one another*. (2nd Ed.). New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Solomon, A. & Wane, N. N. (2005). Indigenous healers and healing in a modern world. In Roy Moodley and William West (Eds.). *Integrating traditional healing practices into counseling and psychotherapy: Multicultural aspects of counseling and psychotherapy*. (pp. 56-60). Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Some', M. P. (1999). *The healing wisdom of Africa: Finding life purpose through nature, ritual and community*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Some', M. P. (1994). *Of water and spirit: Ritual and initiation in the life of an African shaman*. New York: Penguin Putnam Inc.
- Spangenberg, J. J. (2003). The cross-cultural relevance of person-centered counseling in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of counseling and development*, 81 (1): 48-55.
- Stroebe, M., Strobe, W., & Hansson, R. (Eds.). (1993). *Handbook of theory, research and intervention*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stroebe, M. S., & Schunt, H. (2001). Models of coping with bereavement: A review. In M. A. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Shunt (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: consequences, coping, and care* (pp.375-404). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Spring, J. (2004). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality: A brief history of the education of dominated cultures in the United States*. (4th Ed.). New York: MacGraw Hill.

- The New American Bible* (1970). Wichita, Kansas: Fireside Bible Publishers.
- The refugee experience (2006). Spiritual agencies' role in health and healing. Retrieved May 31, 2006: from:
http://early_bird.qeh.ox.ac.uk/rfgexp/rsp_tre/student/nonwest/nm_06.htm.
- Turner, V. (1969). *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Turner, V. (1974). *Dramas and fields and metaphors: Symbolic action in human society*. Ithaca, New York; Cornell University Press.
- UNAIDS (2000). Collaboration with traditional healers in HIV/AIDS prevention and care in sub Saharan Africa: A literature review. Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. Geneva: UNAIDS. <http://www.unaids.org>. Retrieved January 30, 2007.
- UNAIDS (2007). Traditional healers join the AIDS response; Uniting the world against AIDS. 07 February 2007. http://data.unaids.org/publications/IRC-pub07/JC967-tradHealers_en.pdf. Retrieved March 10, 2007.
- van Gennep, A. (1960). *The rites of passage* (M. B. Vizedom & G. L. Caffee, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Usher, C. H. (1989). Recognizing cultural bias in counseling theory: the case of Rogers. *Journal of multicultural counseling and development* (17) 62-71.
- van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experiences: Human science for action sensitive pedagogy*. Ontario, Canada: The Athlone Press.
- Vidich, A. J. & Lyman, S. M. (2006). (2nd ed.). Qualitative methods: Their history in sociology and anthropology. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*. (pp 37-84). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Vision 2016 Council (2004). *Vision 2016: Towards prosperity for all*. Retrieved from <http://www.vision2016.co.bw/index.html> August 4, 2008.
- Walsh-Burke, K. (2005). *Grief and loss: Theories and skills for helping professionals*. Boston: Pearson.
- Weiss, R. S. (2001). Grief bonds and relationships. In M. A. Stroebe., R. O. Hansson, W. Stroebe, and H. Shunt (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement research: Consequences, coping, and care* (pp.47-62). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

- Wessels, M. G., & Monterio, C. (2004). Healing wounds following protracted conflict in Angola: A community-based approach to assisting war-affected children. In U. P. Gielen, J. M. Fish, and J. G. Draguns (Eds.), *Handbook of culture, therapy, and healing*. (pp 321-341). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
- Wilson, G. (1939). 'Nyakusa (Tanzania) Conventions of burials'. *Bantu Studies*, (13) 1-31.
- Witmer, J. M. (1990). Consultancy on establishing a guidance and counsellor education programme at the University of Botswana. Preliminary Report prepared by J. Marvin Witmer, Ohio University College of Education, Athens, Ohio. 28 August 1990.
- Wolfelt, A. (n. d.). A nation mourns: How rituals and ceremony will help us heal. Retrieved on March 7, 2006. from: <http://www.thefuneraldirectory.com/aftermath2.html>.
- Woodson, C. G. (2000). *The mis-education of the Negro*. Chicago, IL: African-American Images.
- Worden, W. J. (1982). *Grief therapy and grief counseling: a handbook for the mental health practitioner*. New York: Springer Publishing Company Inc.
- Worden, W. J. (2001). *Grief therapy and grief counseling: A handbook for the mental health practitioner*. (3rd ed.). New York: Springer Publishing Company Inc.
- Yangaza, S. (1983). Death and the hereafter among inhabitants of Korogwe (p. 27). Field Report, Peramiho Seminary: Peramiho, Tanzania.
- Yasmen-Esmael, H., & Rubin, S. S. (2005). The meaning of structures of Muslim bereavements in Israel: Religions, traditions, mourning practices and human experience. *Death Studies*. July/August, 29 (6): 495-518.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO THE PERMANENT SECRETARY: MINISTRY OF UNIFIED LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS AND LANDS

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Sithandazile Msimanga, a counselor employed by the University of Botswana and currently studying for a doctoral degree in the Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As part of the requirements of the PhD program I am conducting a study on the encounters of widows in Botswana with the indigenous cultural rituals of death, loss and grief. I am requesting permission to conduct this study in Botswana. I have identified some major villages around Gaborone and some selected villages in the North East District, as most relevant areas for this examination.

As you might be aware, there are two approaches of care to widows grieving the loss of their husbands to death in Botswana: the indigenous cultural rituals' approach and the emerging professional counseling interventions. These two approaches are applied parallel to each other yet serving the same population. The study aims to examine the following: the extent to which the indigenous cultural rituals are utilized in response to death and the reverence paid to these cultural structures; and how the insights and knowledge gained from the study can inform more culturally sensitive counseling interventions. This study may not benefit the participants in any material way, but will benefit those women who will experience loss of their spouses to death in the future.

I have received permission from the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of Human subjects to conduct this study. The University's approval indicates that my proposal has been examined by a panel of researchers/academics for ethical procedures and protection of human subjects. My research proposal has been approved by my University dissertation committee.

I anticipate that the study will add to the body of contemporary knowledge regarding the inclusion of indigenous culture in counseling interventions: it also has the potential to bring a taboo-ridden subject, that of death and mourning into a forum for more public discussion. The insight and knowledge gained from the study can assist counselors in Botswana and sub-Saharan Africa in integrating traditional culture into the professional grief counseling interventions. This will ensure provision of a culturally acceptable and sensitive service. A report of the results will be made available to your department once the study is complete.

The study will be conducted through focus group and individual interviews. These sessions will be approximately 1-2 hours in length. The participants for the study will be assigned identifying codes in place of their real names, in order to ensure confidentiality, and this information will be handled by the researcher only. All the interviews will be audio taped, listened to and transcribed by the researcher only; all these materials will be kept in a file in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office at the UB. The tapes as well as any data collected from the participants will be destroyed by the researcher at the completion of the study. The names of the villages and towns that will provide potential participants in the study will be coded to further reinforce participants' protection and privacy rights.

I will be most grateful for your most favored response. I will be looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. In the event that there are questions that need to be answered or clarifications to be made about the study, I can be contacted at: (267) 355-2290 (W) or 74117172 (Cell); or by email at: msimanga94@hotmail.com. You are free to contact my dissertation committee chair Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at (001) 412 396 1871; or by email at: levers@duq.edu.
Sincerely

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education.

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

- 1) Tell me how you heard about the news of your husband's death.
- 2) What are some of the major activities that took place immediately following the pronouncement of your husband's death?
- 3) Can you describe how you experienced the following ritualistic stages during your mourning period?
 - The lying-in period (*go ribama*)
 - The night vigil
 - Being garbed in black (*go roula*)
 - The burial
 - The cleansing ceremony (*go apolwa*)
- 4) What meaning did you associate with these cultural rituals?
- 5) Are there some particular things inherent in rituals that helped you adjust to the loss?
 - a) What are these things?
 - b) Can you describe how these things were helpful to you?
- 6) Are some particular things inherent in the rituals that seemed to hinder your adjustment to the loss?
 - a) What are these things?
 - b) Can you describe how these things hindered your adjustment to the loss?
- 7) Did you attend to professional counseling intervention anytime during your mourning?
- 8) At what period in your mourning did you utilize the professional counseling intervention?
- 9) What issues prompted you to go for professional counseling intervention?
- 10) Can you describe how you experienced the professional counseling intervention?
- 11) What recommendations can you make to the policy makers in Botswana regarding the utilization of the indigenous cultural rituals in the face of death?
- 12) What recommendations can you make to the policy makers in Botswana, regarding the professional counseling intervention when faced with death of a loved one?
- 13) Is there anything that you want to add which was not covered in this discussion, regarding your experiences following the death of your husband?

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- 1) What effect do you think the cultural rituals had on your dealing with the loss of your husband?
- 2) Are there any cultural rituals that you would describe as particularly helpful to you during your mourning period?
 - a) Which are these cultural rituals?
 - b) In what ways were they helpful to you?
- 3) Are there any cultural rituals that were not helpful to you during your mourning period?
 - a) Which are these cultural rituals?
 - b) In what ways were they not helpful?
- 4) What did your involvement in the ritual performances mean to you?
- 5) Did you attend professional counseling intervention at anytime during your mourning?
- 6) At what stage in your mourning stage did you go for professional counseling?
- 7) What issues prompted you to go for professional counseling?
- 8) Can you describe to me how you experienced the professional counseling service?
- 9) What recommendations can you make to the policy makers in Botswana about the use of the indigenous cultural rituals in the face of death?
- 10) What recommendations can you make to the policy makers regarding the professional counseling intervention in the face of death?
- 11) Is there anything else you want to add which was not covered in this discussion regarding your encounters following the death of your husband?

APPENDIX D
DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN BOTSWANA: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF CULTURAL RITUALS OF DEATH, LOSS, GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT-IMPLICATIONS FOR PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING.

Description of the study

As you might be aware, there are two approaches of care to widows grieving the loss of their husbands to death in Botswana: the indigenous cultural rituals' approach and the emerging professional counseling interventions. These two approaches are applied parallel to each other yet serving the same population. The study intends to illuminate the extent to which the cultural rituals are utilized in death and the reverence paid to these cultural structures; a question that directly relates to counseling emerges; How can insights and knowledge gained from the study inform more culturally sensitive counseling interventions?

I have received permission from the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board for the protection of Human subjects to conduct this study. The University's approval indicates that my proposal has been examined by a panel of researchers/academics for ethical procedures and protection of human subjects. My research proposal has been approved by my University dissertation committee.

Before involving any participant in the study, I will make a preliminary mental status assessment to rule out severe depression. Any widow who exhibits signs of severe depression will be exempted from participating in the study. You will then be asked to sign the consent form (Appendix E) and complete your demographic information (Appendix F). The study will be conducted in two stages: the first stage entails taking part in a focus group interview, in which the participants will respond to questions posed by the researcher. Depending on your responses, the interview may go onto a second level in which some selected members from the focus group will be asked to take part in an individual interview. Each of these sessions will last for approximately 1-2 hours.

The participants for the study will be assigned identifying codes in place of their real names to ensure confidentiality and participants' right to privacy; this information will be handled by the researcher only and will be kept in a file in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office in the UB. All the interviews will be audio taped, listened to and transcribed by the researcher only; these tapes as well as any data collected from the respondents will be destroyed by the researcher at the completion of the study.

The names of the chief, villages and VDC members that will identify potential participants for the study will also be allocated identifying codes to further reinforce participants' confidentiality, protection and privacy rights. This information will be kept in a file in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office in the UB and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.

Thank you very much for considering my request. In the event that there are questions that need to be answered or clarifications to be made about the study, I can be contacted at: (267) 355-2290 (W) or 74117172 (Cell); or by email at;

msimanga94@hotmail.com. You are free to contact my dissertation committee chair Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at (001) 412 396 1871; or by email at levers@duq.edu.

Sincerely

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga, MSN, PGDCE, B.Ed., C. M.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education.

APPENDIX E

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY



DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

600 FORBES AVENUE ♦ PITTSBURGH, PA 15282

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

- TITLE:** The Role of Indigenous Cultural Rituals among Widows in Botswana: Ethnographic Perspectives of Death, Loss and Grief.
- INVESTIGATOR:** Sithandazile Hope Msimanga, MSN, PGDCE, B Ed (Nursing), C.M.
University of Botswana Counseling Centre
Gaborone, BOTSWANA.
(267) 355-2290 (w); (267) 71147172 (Cell) or email: msimanga94@hotmail.com.
- ADVISOR:** Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers
Duquesne University
Department of Counseling, Psychology
and Special Education
110 F Canevin Hall
(412) 396 1871 or
Email: levers@duq.edu.
- SOURCE OF SUPPORT:** This study is being undertaken in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Doctoral Degree in the Executive Counselor Education and Supervision program at Duquesne University.
- PURPOSE:** You are being requested to take part in the study that intends to examine the experiences of widows in relation to indigenous cultural rituals of death, loss and grief. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form and to complete your demographic information. The study involves your participation in the focus group interview; depending on your responses you may be asked to take part in another focus group or an individual interview. Each of these sessions (focus and individual interview) will be approximately 1-2 hours in length. The focus of both the group and the individual interview is on how widows encounter the indigenous cultural rituals of death, loss and grief as they

mourn the loss of their husbands to death; and the extent to which these cultural structures are utilized and reverence paid to them in response to death. The interview will be audio-taped and transcribed for purposes of data analysis. These are the only requests to be made of you.

**RISKS AND
BENEFITS:**

One major risk possible from participating in the study is that it may bring back to you the painful memories of the loss of your husbands. Beyond this risk, other risks may not exceed the intensity of those that we encounter in everyday life. In the event that you need counseling services, you can contact the following professional counselors, from the University of Botswana, who will be accommodated in a nearby hotel for the duration of the study: they are Mrs. Tiny Sento-Pelaelo, M. S., Ed. (267) 355 2292; Mrs. Chebangwe Pilane M. S., Ed. (267) 355 2291)

The study may not provide any immediate or material benefits to you, but will yield information that can assist counselors in intervening with other women who may lose their husbands to death in the future in Botswana and sub Saharan Africa.

COMPESATION:

There will be no compensation associated with this study. There is no cost for your participation in the study, either. However if you need to be assisted with transportation for the interview, this will be made available to you by the researcher. Please contact the researcher at one of the telephone numbers provided below, the night before the meeting if you need to be transported. Light refreshments will be served after the meeting.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

All information that you share during the study will be kept strictly confidential. Your responses will not be shared with the Chief, or any of the VDC members; and your identities will not be revealed in reporting the results. Code numbers will be used in place of your real names to protect your privacy and ensure confidentiality. During the data collection and analysis process; your chiefs, villages or towns and the VDC members too will be identified by means of code numbers. This is to further ensure your privacy rights and to maintain confidentiality. The tapes will be listened to and transcribed by the researcher only, and will always be kept in a file in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office in the University of Botswana. All

materials and information gathered for the study will be destroyed by the researcher at the completion of the study.

**RIGHT TO
WITHDRAW:**

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. You are free to withdraw from the study anytime that you choose and all the information that may have been collected thus far will be destroyed immediately. Your withdrawal from the study will not affect your life in any negative way. If you would like to have more information or are dissatisfied with any part in the process of the study, you may contact the researcher; Sithandazile Msimanga at {(267) 71147172 (Cell); or (267) 355-2290 –Work; Email: msimanga94@hotmail.com}. You may also contact my dissertation advisor for this study; Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers - Office (001) 412 396 1871; email: levers@duq.edu), or the Chair of the Duquesne University Institutional Review Board; Dr. Paul Richer (Office – (001) 412 396 4306; email: richer@duq.edu).

**SUMMARY OF
RESULTS:**

A summary of the results of the study will be made available to your office at no cost, upon request.

**VOLUNTARY
CONSENT:**

I have read the above statements and understand what is requested of me? I also understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason I may have. On these terms, I certify that I am willing to participate in this research project.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX F
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographic Information

Name _____

1. Age: _____

2. Tribe _____

3. Educational level (*please circle one*):

a. Elementary School b. High School c. Some College

d. College Degree e. Graduate Degree

f. Other _____

4. How long is it since your husband passed away?

5. When was your cleansing ceremony performed?

APPENDIX G

LETTER TO THE TRIBAL AUTHORITIES (CHIEFS)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am Sithandazile Msimanga, an employee with the University of Botswana; and I am currently studying for a doctoral degree at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As part of the requirements of the PhD program I am undertaking a study on the encounters of widows in Botswana in relation to indigenous rituals of death, loss and grief.

Subsequently I am requesting for permission to identify widows in your village to participate in this study, through the help of the Village Development Committee (VDC) members. The widows should meet following criteria; (a) widows who lost their husband in the past six to twelve months and are no more than five years past the loss, (b) have undergone and completed all the culturally recognized rituals of mourning, (c) widows should be in the age range of 35-55 years. Once the potential participants have been identified and given their permission for me to contact then, I will schedule a place and time for an informational session which will last for 30 minutes at the District office's Conference room.

As you might be aware, there are two approaches of care to widows grieving the loss of their husbands to death in Botswana: the indigenous cultural rituals' approach and the emerging professional counseling interventions. These two approaches are applied parallel to each other yet serving the same population. The study intends to portray the extent to which the cultural rituals are utilized in response to death. and the reverence paid to these cultural structures; and how the insights and knowledge gained from the study can inform more culturally sensitive counseling interventions. This study may not benefit the participants in any material way, but will benefit those women who will experience the loss of their spouses in the future, in Botswana and sub Saharan Africa

I have received permission from Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Unified Local Governments and Lands in Gaborone, to conduct this study.

I anticipate that the study will add to the body of knowledge and will bring a taboo-ridden subject, that of death, for discussion in a public forum. The insight and knowledge gained from the study can assist counselors in Botswana and sub-Saharan Africa in integrating traditional culture into the professional grief counseling interventions. This will ensure provision of a culturally acceptable and sensitive counseling service. The results will be made available to your office once the study is complete.

The study will be conducted through focus group and individual interviews. These sessions will be approximately 1-2 hours in length. The participants for the study will be assigned identifying codes in place of their real names to protect their privacy and ensure confidentiality and participant protection; this information will be handled by the researcher only. Additionally all the interviews will be audio taped, listened to and transcribed by the researcher only; all this material will be kept in a file in a locked

cabinet in the researcher's office at the UB. The tapes as well as any data collected from the participants will be destroyed by the researcher at the completion of the study. Your name and that of the village will be coded to further reinforce participants' protection and privacy rights. There will be no identifying information either for the VDC members or the participants.

I will be most grateful for your most favored response. I will be looking forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. In the event that there are questions that need to be answered or clarifications to be made about the study, I can be contacted at: (267) 355-2290 (W) or 74117172) Cell); or by email at; msimanga94@hotmail.com. You are free to contact my dissertation committee chair Dr. Lisa Lopez Levers at (001) 412 396 1871; or by email at: levers@duq.edu.

Sincerely

Sithandazile Hope Msimanga
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education.

APPENDIX H

LETTER OF PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN BOTSWANA

TELEPHONE: 3611100
FAX: 3907426



REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA

MINISTRY OF LABOUR AND HOME AFFAIRS
PRIVATE BAG 002
GABORONE

REF: CHA 1/17/2 X (22)

12 October 2007

Miss Sithandazile Hope Msimanga
528 S Winebiddle St Apt 2
Pittsburg, PA 15224
United States of America

Dear Madam,

APPLICATION FOR A RESEARCH PERMIT

Please refer to your application for a research permit dated 28 September 2007.

You are hereby granted permission to carry out research entitled **"The role of cultural rituals among widows in Botswana: Ethnographic experiences of Death, loss and grief."**

The permission is granted subject to the following conditions:-

1. Copies of any report/video produced are deposited with the Director of Research and Development office of the University of Botswana, Department of Culture & Youth, Botswana National Library Service and Botswana National Archives and Records Services.
2. The Permit does not give authority to enter any premises, private establishment or protected area. Permission for such entry should be negotiated with those concerned.
3. The permit is valid for a period beginning 12 October 2007 to 12 December 2007.
4. You shall conduct the study according to the particulars furnished in the application form.
5. Failure to comply with any of the above – stipulated conditions will result in the immediate cancellation of the permit.

Yours faithfully


.....
Ogomoditse M. Matsila

For/ **PERMANENT SECRETARY**

Omm/gm